

Czech Green Building Council launched

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The Czech Green Building Council (CzGBC) will have a broad range of activities, especially in education and promotion, influence on the state environmental policy and legislation and specialized education. CzGBC's long-term objective is to promote the certification of building sustainability on a national scale. However, the association will operate similarly to such institutions abroad and intends to apply for membership in the international organization World Green Building Council.

The association's founding members are the following companies: Atrea, Autodesk, Cigler/Marani Architects, Edwards and Zuck, EkoWATT, Gardiner & Theobald, JRD, Sekyra Group, Skanska CZ, Schneider Electric CZ, Traficon and Zumtobel.

In many respects, CzGBC wants to follow up on the activities of the Czech Society for Sustainable Construction and the Passive House Centre, with which it intends to cooperate. Ira Saul Rubinstein, of Traficon (which deals with alternative sources of energy), elected as the association's chair, emphasized three main principles of operation of CzGBC at a press conference: the association is based on the activities of the private sector, environmental construction is part of business and can be used as a competitive advantage even in marketing, while the term "green" does not only apply to energy savings, but the overall respect of the buildings to the environment.

(more information at www.czgbc.org)

How the founders see it

Leoš Andrlé, Sekyra Group:

What does Sekyra Group expect from the association?

Especially the much needed know-how. We have already cooperated with most members of the association, especially on the National Technical Library building, but we wish to further enhance this cooperation. The more so because we are currently planning several large projects, such as the Smíchov Railway Station. We prepare urban concepts in these locations for many years ahead and want to do this responsibly and professionally. And we are aware that technology can help us very much. It is not a problem to simulate for example Sun movements during the whole year in a project - and sometimes if you move the facade by a mere one metre, the building will stop overheating. But it is not only about technology.

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We also want to make it publicly known that we are behaving responsibly to the environment. That is why we are much interested in certification systems and their implementation in the Czech Republic - it is necessary for us to demonstrate this responsibility not only in words, but through real actions. And we want to use this in marketing.

Will the customers listen to this marketing?

Definitely, but it largely depends on education. And training and promotion are one of the main goals of the association. In my opinion, this will go the same way as energy labels on electrical appliances. Few people are able or willing to calculate the actual amounts from them, yet people make their choice

according to the label, knowing they will save money. The same applies to commercial properties - savings on operating costs are a convincing argument.

Jan Řežáb, JRD:

Why have you become a member of the association?

As a leader in energy-saving residential construction, JRD is also striving for general popularization, educational activities and cooperation with universities. In many of these activities, our efforts are in line with the organization's goals.

What is the current condition of this area in the Czech Republic - including construction of energy-saving houses?

The construction of low-energy and passive houses is a fashionable topic today. There are enough needed materials, we know the technical solutions and have even the necessary examples of good projects. The problem, however, consists in the share of such buildings in the total volume so far. Among family houses, the increase is already visible, because the builder is the user who exploits the savings on operation. The user is therefore motivated to take energy-saving measures, whose price is currently even lower than 10% of the price of the family house. As regards apartment houses, there are occasional "low-energy" proclamations, but so far the only realized low-energy apartment houses are our projects. And our share on the flats market in Prague is about 1%. The situation is even worse for commercial properties - there are almost no buildings of this type at all.

Petr Kužela, Cigler/Marani Architects

What is currently the awareness of green buildings or sustainable construction among investors and property developers?

I would say it is getting higher. We especially work on commercial projects and I can say that investors are already very interested in this issue - energy savings as well as certifications.

At the press conference you mentioned the issue of sustainable construction in connection with monument protection. Can these two issues be combined at all or even solved together?

I would say so. A short time ago I saw Alvar Aalto's functionalistic house in Finland, where triple pane windows were mounted in original frames and insulation foam was injected in hollow walls. Of course, it is necessary to take these steps very sensitively, you can hardly mount a thermal insulation system on a Baroque facade. But for example industrial buildings give numerous opportunities in this respect. It is certainly possible to talk with conservationists, it is all a matter of discussion.

You are the only architectural studio among the founders - does it mean that your profession is not too interested in the issue of green buildings?

Just like these trends are gaining grounds and spreading among property developers, there is no doubt the number of architects who will perceive the environmental aspects of construction sensitively will grow.

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