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Beyond sustainability. How to regenerate the built environment using the Living Building Challenge principles.

Carlo Battisti, Paola Moschini

Macro Design Studio, Rovereto (Trento), Italy

Over the last twenty years, green building has grown to become the most important and progressive trend in the building industry. There have been huge steps forward in the design, construction and operation of buildings, and yet when compared with the rate of change that is required to avoid the worst effects of climate change and other global environmental challenges, our progress has been minute and barely recordable.

It's time to imagine a living future and a world of living buildings. The Living Buildings Challenge[™], developed and promoted by the International Living Future Institute (ILFI) based in Seattle (WA), is a philosophy, certification and advocacy tool for projects to move beyond merely being less bad and to become truly regenerative. The Challenge defines the most advanced measure of sustainability in the built environment possible today and acts to rapidly diminish the gap between current limits and the end-game positive solutions we seek [taken from ILFI web site].

To "go beyond sustainability" and foster a real regenerative change, Macro Design Studio in collaboration with ILFI has organized REGENERATION (April, 15th to 18th), the first design competition in Europe entirely based on the LBC protocol. REGENERATION as the first "generation" of young professionals (architects, engineers) that can "regenerate" with their own ideas the built environment. Purpose of the competition is to show the best sustainable regeneration project for an existing public building for the community of Dro, a small village in the mountains of northern Italy, near the Garda Lake.

Purpose of this paper is to describe how all this was possible and how the introduction of LBC philosophy in the European context could really change in a disruptive way the construction market and the life of our communities.

Already some attempts to import in Europe the "Living Building Challenge" approach have been made, starting some buildings pilot projects. But it's hard to entrench the use of a tool, even technically valuable as LBC, without first stimulating a convinced local demand and promote a cultural change. We therefore decided to overturn the approach, starting "bottom-up" from the most lively and intelligent resources that our European nations have at their disposal: young architects and engineers.

How can we imagine the cities and communities of the future? Existing sustainability protocols are taking less care of the relationships among buildings and between buildings and the urban space all around. The cities of the future that we imagine, are autonomous or capable to exchange resources from one building to another, free from private cars, able to recycle all the waste they produce, harmoniously integrated with nature, benefitting from the work of responsible companies, supported by ethically acceptable investments.

Is this an utopian vision? Maybe not. Macro Design is working to go in that direction. Another step in this roadmap is the creation of the Living Building Challenge Collaborative: Italy, a network of innovators who will meet periodically to share knowledge and create local conditions that would facilitate the development of "living" buildings, neighbourhoods, cities and communities.