Sustainable Development, Wood, and Build Environment in Slovenia and Sweden

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Forestry and forest-related industries have become more focused on the major challenges of the future, especially climate change and resource depletion. The use of forest products in long life products, such as built environment applications, allows for the possibility of extended storage of atmospheric carbon dioxide. Despite many sustainable and green building activities in recent years there is a lot of room for expansion and improvement in this area. In fact, a shift towards new building paradigms is just beginning. These paradigms shift the standard from minimal and zero environmental impact, towards positive impacts for both the environment and society. Contemporary timber architecture brings the beauty and restorative effects of the forest into cities and the built environment.

In this paper, the Slovenian and Swedish case is presented in relation to the current European and regional developments in the increased use of wood as a construction material for the future. The future developments of the built environment are affected by Green Public Procurement (GPP), which is result of European communication COM (2008) 400 “Public procurement for a better environment”. GPP in the construction sector in Slovenia is primarily affected and regulated by the technical specifications and award criteria for buildings, as specified in Annex 7 of the Decree Amending the Decree on Green Public Procurement (2011). In the category of buildings, it is in generally required that 30 % of in-built material (by volume) must be wood or wood based (50 % of this – 15 % of the total volume – can be substituted by products with EcoLabels I or III). Furthermore, an award criterion awards additional credit if the 30 % minimum threshold is exceeded. On the other hand GPP in Sweden in that area is not specified in such detailed level. However, the Swedish government initiated the development of the Swedish Instrument for Ecologically Sustainable Procurement (the EKU-instrument) already in 1998. The EKU-instrument has now become a web-based tool intended to aid in the development of environmental procurement criteria and to assist procurement organizations with guidance and information in their attempts at greening their operations (Swedish Environmental Management Council 2006). The traditional way of procuring construction work is that the local government first designs the building or structure, either by using in-house design engineers or by procuring external consultancy firms. The local government thereafter procures one or several contractors who are responsible for the actual construction. The environmental concerns are usually dealt with during the design stage and thus integrated in contract specifications instead of as selection criteria, award criteria, or contract performance clauses.