

Wood, bricks and stone often seen as the most sustainable facade products

Bricks have a convincing image of the most sustainable facade product. Wood is also seen as the most sustainable product in the UK, but the same material has a contradictory image in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. These are some of the conclusions of the Q3 2013 European Architectural Barometer report, a quarterly research among 1,600 architects in eight European countries. European architects act as a leading indicator for the construction activity.









When architects are asked for the most and least sustainable façade materials/ products, three materials turn out to be mentioned as the most sustainable ones: bricks, wood and stone. It should be noted that architects hardly ever question the sustainability of bricks. Especially in countries like Germany, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium, these products are strongly related to a sustainability image.

Not the same, however, can be said about wood: in France, the Netherlands and Belgium, architects seem to have opposing opinions. Wood is referred to as the most as well as the least sustainable material. The same can be said about concrete, in France (pointed out as most sustainable by 13% of the French architects, but at the same time, 10% see concrete as the most unsustainable material).

In general, concrete and the façade panels (composite or HPL) often find their place among the least sustainable materials and products - a point to be taken into account by the producers of such products.

In a sector where the importance of sustainability is growing and more than two thirds of architects are proactive in sustainability and specifying sustainable products, the image of the products is important. There will always be aspects related to the sustainability of the products which will or may be questioned; but the negative image of a whole group of materials could be of disadvantage for those products in the future, and even lead to be totally ignored by a certain group of architects. The longer a product is being perceived as least sustainable, the longer it will take to improve its image.

Top 3 most/least sustainable materials – Facade materials

								
Most sustainable	1 Wood (55%)	Bricks (56%)	Wood (19%)	Bricks (47%)	Bricks (57%)	Bricks (40%)	Bricks (50%)	Bricks (16%)
	2 Bricks (10%)	Wood (11%)	Bricks (15%)	Stone (10%)	Wood (14%)	Wood (21%)	Wood (8%)	Architectural glass (7%)
	3 Stone (5%)	Architectural glass (6%)	Concrete (13%)	Ceramic (7%)	Other facade panel material than HPL & ACM (5%)	Architectural glass (5%)	Stone (7%)	Ceramic facade tiles (4%)
Least sustainable	1 Concrete (26%)	Aluminium Composite materials (ACM) (34%)	Wood (17%)	Aluminium Composite materials (ACM) (22%)	Concrete (44%)	Plastic (22%)	Plastic (17%)	High Pressure Laminate (HPL) facade materials (12%)
	2 Plastic (15%)	Other facade panel material than HPL & ACM (21%)	Other facade panel material than HPL & ACM (16%)	Architectural glass (18%)	High Pressure Laminate (HPL) facade materials (10%)	Steel/ metal (12%)	Other facade panel material than HPL & ACM (11%)	Concrete (12%)
	3 Aluminium Composite materials (ACM) (10%)	High Pressure Laminate (HPL) facade materials (12%)	Concrete (10%)	Concrete (13%)	Aluminium Composite materials (ACM) (8%)	Wood (9%)	Wood (10%)	Aluminium Composite materials (ACM) (3%)

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These and many other results and trends of the developments of the European construction market can be found in the European Architectural Barometer, an international market research conducted among 1,600 architects in Europe. This study is conducted in Germany, France, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium and Poland by Arch-Vision four times a year. Besides indicators to forecast the European building volumes, a specific topic is highlighted each quarter. The topic in Q3 2013 was "Sustainability". Architects can be used not only as a reliable source for future building volumes information, but their role is very important as they have great influence on how projects are built and which materials are used.

For more information about Arch-Vision please contact Ms. Ralitsa Ruseva at ruseva@arch-vision.eu or at +31-10-2066900.