
THE DEVELOPMENT AND FUTURE OF THE CSC CERTIFICATION SYSTEM FOR RESPONSIBLY SOURCED CONCRETE

AN INTERVIEW WITH CSC CHAIRMAN DR. ALEXANDER
RÖDER AND VICE-CHAIRMAN DR. CHRISTIAN ARTELT



Concrete becomes more sustainable by the day. Transparency, accountability and legitimacy have become common practice in the building industry. Consequently, the Cement Sustainability Initiative (CSI), supported by the WBCSD, was founded together with industry partners including certification institutes and associations as well as the Concrete Sustainability Council (CSC).

The goal of the CSC is to develop a new global responsible sourcing certification system for concrete. The CSC certification system has similarities with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification system for wood and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) system for fish. The CSC certification system is designed to help concrete, cement and aggregate companies all over the world obtain an insight into the level at which a company operates in an environmentally, socially and economically responsible way.

The CSC certification system aims to improve transparency and highlights the essential role of concrete in creating a sustainable construction sector by getting recognition in green procurement government policies and building rating systems such as BREEAM, LEED and DGNB. This is highly ambitious and the scope is global.

SGS is one of the CSC's founding members, being present quite early in the development process of the CSC. SGS issued their first CSC certificate at Building Holland in June 2017 to Bosch Beton B.V. In the meantime, more than 49 ready mixed and precast concrete plants from different market actors are CSC-certified throughout the Netherlands and Canada.



Alexander Röder



Christian Artelt

The leading professionals of CSC, Dr. Alexander Röder (CEMEX), chairman of CSC and Dr. Christian Artelt (HeidelbergCement), vice-chairman talk about CSC and its future.

WHY DID THE CSI AND ITS PARTNERS LAUNCH A RESPONSIBLE SOURCING SYSTEM FOR CONCRETE?

Alexander Röder: It all started a couple of years ago when a study revealed that in many green building labels, such as LEED and BREEAM, there was a credit for responsibly sourced materials, but in reality for most materials, including concrete, there was no corresponding certification in the market. In other words, there was a credit, but it was almost impossible to obtain. During

initial research around the topic we quickly realized that many stakeholders were asking for guarantees that the production of our materials complies with minimum sustainability standards. As our sector nowadays has very good sustainability performance, the decision to develop a responsible sourcing system was straightforward. This led to the CSI teaming up with a number of trade associations in the concrete and related sectors and starting to develop the certification process.

WHY HAVE YOUR COMPANIES CHOSEN TO PLAY AN ACTIVE PART IN THE CONCRETE SUSTAINABILITY COUNCIL?

Christian Artelt: With the decision to join the CSC as a founding member, HeidelbergCement committed to actively contribute to the development of a certification system for responsibly sourced concrete that promotes transparency of a company's regard for sustainable actions and management. The system helps develop a better understanding of the positive characteristics of concrete. Concrete is indeed a plentiful and ubiquitous construction material: it is characterized by excellent technical, performance and aesthetic properties. Concrete is fabricated in Europe in compliance with the highest environmental and social standards and is the sustainable backbone of modern societies – often without being acknowledged as such. The CSC system today values environmentally and socially compliant practices during the production of concrete, enabling sustainability to become “measurable” in an objective manner.

Alexander Röder: At CEMEX we share the view of HeidelbergCement. As a global player we definitely see the worldwide relevance of CSC certification. It is a perfect fit not only for increasing stakeholder demand for responsibly sourced materials, but also for our own sustainability strategy, in which providing sustainable products and services is a priority.

HOW DO YOU LOOK BACK AT THE FIRST PERIOD UNTIL NOW AND WHAT ARE YOU PARTICULARLY PROUD OF?

Alexander Röder: It has been very rewarding to see how our initial, broad idea

of a certification for sustainably sourced concrete has gradually developed into what we have now. All the discussions about how to define the criteria, the growing interest from concrete producers, associations and certification bodies such as SGS. The very productive stakeholder consultation workshop we did last year with experts from IUCN, WWF, UNEP and other organizations, the formal set-up of the CSC as an organization. The handover of the first certificates at the Building Holland fair in April this year, and the ongoing expansion of our certification system... it is like watching a child growing up.

At this point I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those individuals and organizations who contributed to our development in different ways. For example, as volunteers to pilot our certification, as members of the various committees of our organization, as well as the critical but fair stakeholders who reviewed our technical framework. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the continuous financial and in-kind support that we have received from the CSI over the last couple of years. Without all this commitment and expertise there would be no CSC today. This commitment is an indicator for what I am particularly proud of. We have created a certification system for sustainably sourced concrete that our stakeholders believe in. This is true for the CEOs of the CSI member companies, who decided to support us, to the operators of those concrete plants that have already been certified. It also applies to representatives of environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who have supported the development of the technical framework, and to the Dutch government that has recognized CSC certification through a tax incentive for sustainable construction.

IN THE MEANTIME, THE CSC CERTIFICATION SYSTEM HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTED IN THE NETHERLANDS AND CANADA WITH MORE THAN 49 CERTIFICATES ISSUED. WHERE AND WHEN DO YOU EXPECT MARKET UPTAKE NEXT?

Alexander Röder: In our view, CSC certification will have most value in those countries where sustainable

construction is high on the agenda and green building labels have a noticeable market share. For example, North America and Europe can certainly be expected to see the majority of certifications in the near future. First certificates have been issued to concrete plants in Canada, and we already have so-called Regional System Operator (RSO) agreements with associations in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Turkey. Nonetheless, we are also in active talks with entities in other regions such as the Middle East and India. Latin America is also a very interesting prospective market. The Latin American umbrella trade association for ready-mixed concrete, FIHP, is a member of the CSC. We have been awarded a UNEP grant to prepare the rollout of our certification on that continent. In the long run our vision is to have a global reach to maximize the benefits of our certification for the sector, the environment and all our stakeholders.

WHY SHOULD COMPANIES APPLY FOR A CSC CERTIFICATE?

Christian Artelt: I see many good reasons for companies to apply for CSC certification.

CSC certification is a fantastic opportunity for concrete producers to strengthen sustainable thinking amongst customers and society as a whole to underline the environmental, social and other benefits related to constructing in concrete. An important reason for companies to apply for CSC certification is the unique opportunity offered by the CSC to be part of a successful campaign to explain and promote the positive characteristics of concrete and to participate in implementing an adequate appreciation of concrete in our society. Being part of this campaign will allow companies to enter into a more in-depth dialogue on sustainability with their customers and a broad range of other stakeholders.

The CSC certification system will enable participating companies to learn more about their own sustainability performance and to identify levers for improving their sustainability

practices. Certification will of course also provide an insight into the sustainability performance of the supply chain and to identify opportunities for action. Finally, another key-reason to apply for CSC certification is the positive business impact that this will have in the near future. The CSC is in dialogue with the respected Green Building Label owners, namely USGBC, BRE and DGNB and expects recognition of the CSC system within the respective labels (i.e. LEED, BREEAM and DGNB) shortly. This will enable CSC-certified concrete suppliers to provide their customers with the opportunity to additionally gain responsible sourcing related points in certified Green Building projects. Although this opportunity will be new for certified concrete, it is already current practice for other construction materials. Other business opportunities, many of them already implemented in the NL, relate to public tendering, tax incentives or access to more favorable interest rates.

WHAT IS THE AMBITION OF CSC IN TIME AND WHAT IMPACT IS THE CSC SYSTEM EXPECTED TO ESTABLISH ENVIRONMENTALLY AND FOR THE CHAIN OF CUSTODY?

Alexander Röder: The CSC certification was designed to improve the sustainability performance of single plants and the whole sector. A transparent points system, together with several certification levels, will allow plants to identify gaps and become better over time. Even if a plant does not aspire to a higher level its management cannot just lean back and do nothing. In close collaboration with internal and external stakeholders our technical framework will be regularly updated and strengthened, so when a re-certification is due after three years, the same performance level may not be sufficient to keep the certification level. In terms of credits covered by the certification we have identified those that are most relevant to our sector and we also differentiate between the various products covered by our certification system. In the environmental category, for instance, we cover a broad range of topics including product information for energy

and climate, water, biodiversity and others. The biodiversity credit for example, has a much higher weight for cement and aggregates plants where we have mining operations, compared to concrete plants that cover only a relatively minor stretch of land. Fortunately, the supply chain for the concrete business is very short and normally very local, which means that chain of custody is not a major topic for us. Our concrete plants typically know very well where their raw materials come from.

If we are successful with our approach we will create multiple benefits, a reduced environmental footprint, ever improving social standards, a more transparent communication with our stakeholders, additional value for our clients and an opportunity to demonstrate leadership at both plant and sector level.

WHY ARE COMPANIES LIKE SGS INVOLVED?

Christian Artelt: Credibility is one of the CSC core-principles and that is why certification institutes such as SGS get involved. While the CSC is supported by regional system operators (RSOs) with excellent knowledge of the local concrete business in implementing and developing the certification system, independent certification bodies (CBs) ensure, that the quality of the evidence provided by candidates undergoing certification is in line with the CSC handbook and the organization's expectation. The task of a CB consequently, is to carefully evaluate the soundness of the evidence provided by the applicant via the "CSC Toolbox" and to perform selected on-site visits to verify this evidence in more detail. The CSC obviously ensures that certification is only performed by qualified CBs with proven in-depth certification know-how and a good understanding of the concrete sector. With this, the CSC secures that certification is done in a professional and efficient manner.

For more information about CSC certification, please contact SGS INTRON Certification.