

The Age of Stupid

We live in the times, that the English movie about climate change calls: "The Age of Stupid"¹. In the film, a lone survivor, in a devastated world in the year 2055, shows scenes of the natural disasters that are happening in our days. And he asks: "Why didn't we stop climate change when we had the chance?"

And why aren't we, professionals involved in the real estate industry, as well as in other productive sectors, looking at this issue with the importance and urgency it deserves?

A survey conducted by the Bayer Consulting, with 754 executives in the U.S. housing market (mostly real estate developers and property owners), shows that the main factor that discourages them from developing "green buildings" is the cost of certification. This value, according to the Northbridge Environmental Management Consultants, may vary between 0.2% and 0.4% over the selling price of the property. Very little to justify the industry's gridlock. The lack of knowledge and the difficulty in quantifying the benefits and increased construction costs are among some other reasons stated by the interviewees.

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development, questioned 1,423 professionals, from various countries about what percentage they think that the housing sector contributes in the total greenhouse gases emissions on the planet. The average of responses was 19%. Less than half the average current amount, which is 40%. Another question in this study was the estimated additional cost to build a green building compared to a conventional one, and the average answer was 17% more.

According to a study conducted by the prestigious British consultancy firm Davis Langdon with 221 certified green buildings, in half of them there was no increase in costs and the other half there was only a modest rise, ranging from 1% to 2%.

We need to know in detail what are the costs of implementing sustainable technologies and what are their benefits, especially during the operation phase of the buildings, which accounts for about 80% of all consumption of natural and financial resources, considering their entire life cycle. This however, taking into account the various types of companies and the numerous combinations of possible technologies that could be used within each nation's socio-environmental reality.

We are in a vicious cycle, where the government and firms invest little in research and, consequently, researchers do not have sufficient resources to perform detailed studies. The mainstream media don't report the benefits of sustainable construction, because there is little relevant information in this area in the world, and users are unaware of benefits during the occupation phase of the buildings.

Developers justify that they don't develop green buildings because they are more expensive to build and customers do not pay anything extra to buy them. The architects argue that developers do not allow them to specify sustainable technologies in the projects. Construction companies say that they don't build them because the projects don't specify sustainable technologies and developers don't pay for sustainable procedures during construction. So, the real estate industry goes along with the rest of the contemporary population, which may be known in future history as those who lived in "The Age of Stupid".

Hamilton F. Leite Jr.
www.hamiltonleite.com.br

¹ www.spannerfilms.net/films/ageofstupid