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Conference : Getting the measure *Baukultur* – pour un espace de vie de qualité
4th and 5th November 2019 at the Pavillon Sicli in Geneva
Parallel session 3: Systematising quality

The United Nations' Integrated Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s *Summary for Policy Makers* outlines the immediate measures required to limit global warming to 1.5°C during the current century. To achieve this target, global action will require “*rapid and far-reaching transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport, and cities*” to reduce net emissions of CO₂ by half of current levels by 2030, and reach net zero by 2050.

The challenge is overwhelming – more so when you consider the hole we're starting from. Meeting the 2030 challenge requires a radical refocusing towards embodied energy. We need to face new questions: how do we choose between two different wall assemblies, two window suppliers, two doors, two walls, two structural systems? Assuming both options perform and cost the same, does one contain minerals and materials that were sustainably sourced, processed and transported? Was one sourced and processed with fair labour? Does either option have half the carbon footprint of the industry norm? What is the norm?

How do we answer these questions and how are they an integral part of the future of a Baukultur? First, we need international standards to address the total lack of embodied and operational benchmarks immediately. Second – regional and city planning departments could begin installing maximum CO₂/m² thresholds for new construction, and telegraphing to the industry timetables for implementation. Architects and engineers could focus their continuing education to better understand their material choices – from their molecular to their planetary aspects – and work to find incentives for suppliers to make their processes more transparent. Similar to the radical shift required of our diets, we're required to build our cities from materials we understand the provenance of: materials that are good, clean and fair.

We have one decade to cut our emissions by one half, while still building the houses, schools, hospitals and infrastructure required by continued population growth. We have one decade to halve the emissions of the operations and maintenance of the building stock, infrastructure and cities we've inherited – all without expending a greater amount of embodied energy in the process. We have much less than a decade to establish in Europe – regionally, nationally – benchmarks for everything that goes into our buildings, our infrastructure and our landscapes to enable us to make informed decisions, and against which to measure our progress. We have no time to hesitate in demanding, engaging and acting.