

## LCiP's maturity assessment conclusions (Building Sector)

### FOREWORD

#### Life Cycle approaches

Life Cycle Thinking (LCT) helps companies make their businesses more attractive while limiting their environmental impacts and improving their competitiveness. At the same time, LCT is a strategic choice to orient developments. This method helps to assess the environmental impacts of a system (product, service, process, organization ...), starting from the extraction of raw materials to its end of life.



#### LCiP Project

LCiP<sup>1</sup> aims to help SMEs in France (Nord-Pas de Calais), Belgium (Wallonia), Portugal and Spain (Basque country) to identify and reduce the environmental impacts of their products and services across the entire Life Cycle in three sectors: building, energy & recycling.

#### Maturity assessment

The maturity assessment aims to understand the current capacity of business sectors and SMEs in each sector and region to implement life cycle approaches. Based on a common framework of questions, surveys and interviews have been conducted in each sector in each region. The qualitative assessment for the **Building sector** (including France (Nord-Pas de Calais), Belgium (Wallonia), Portugal and Spain (Basque Country)) is presented below.

<sup>1</sup> the project is co-funded by the [LIFE+ Environment Policy and Governance Programme](#) of the EU

## MATURITY ASSESSMENT RESULTS

### Segmentation:

More than 130 organisations provided feedback to the maturity assessment survey, covering the entire value chain of the building sector (companies and support organizations<sup>2</sup>):

- **Companies** are mainly regional and national SMEs and microenterprises offering B2B services.
- **Support organisations** are mainly private organisations within a regional activity.

### Overall environmental strategy:

Most of the companies and support organisations integrate environmental considerations in their strategy and practices, although in the North of France and in the Basque Country they are not as extended as in Wallonia and Portugal. This environmental strategy is in general promoted and supported by the top management. Moreover, more than half of the responding companies are taking into account environmental criteria in their investments. Resource consumption (especially energy and materials and water as well) is seen as the top environmental issue for the building sector throughout all the regions.

### Life Cycle orientation of the business's environmental management:

The regulation and the commitment of the top management are the two main drivers for the companies to get involved in environmental management and monitoring issues. Regarding the market, most of the companies feel that the clients are not sufficiently demanding a life cycle oriented environmental strategy (in France it was not asked):

The different regions have a different perception as to where do companies have the greatest influence in the life cycle phases.

*North of France specificity: Use and construction are the life cycle phases where companies have the most influence.*

*Wallonia specificity: The raw materials phase is where the companies most influence in relation to the life cycle approach.*

*Portugal specificity: The production and transport are the life cycle phases where companies have the most influence.*

*Basque Country specificity: The end-of-life phase is where the companies most influence in relation to the life cycle approach.*

The lack of information and knowledge is the obstacle most pointed to in the implementation of LC approaches. Financial and technical difficulties are the other hurdles which commonly slow down the implementation of LC approaches.

<sup>2</sup> This covers all organisations that are directly within the value chain (research institute, eco-organism, consultants, etc.)

Globally, the environmental strategies of the building companies have a generalist character rather than a life cycle approach. The most used strategy is dedicated to the reduction of resource consumption. To a lesser degree but also commonly used, are eco-design and environmental labelling tools. The environmental management systems such as ISO 14001, GHG assessment, Green procurement, PassivHaus planning package and other methods or tools to reduce pollution and resources consumption are also used.

North of France specificity: The vast majority of the companies have an environmental management system in place and conduct carbon footprints.

Wallonia specificity: The main tool is the Environmental Management System (ISO14001, EMAS, ...) (63.5%) and simplified LCA is also used by half of respondents.

Portugal specificity: The most used tool is the reduction of resources consumption (material, energy, water).

Basque Country specificity: The two main tools used are the reduction of the consumption of energy, waste, water and resources, as well as environmental management systems such as ISO 14001.

The history of life cycle thinking integration in companies has demonstrated a real diversity, although we can say that most of the building companies have been working on this issue for between 2 and 5 years. The vast majority of the building companies develop LC approaches with internal staff and in most cases nobody in particular is responsible for the implementation of LC approaches. The internal communication is in general more systematic than the external.

At the same time, most of the support organisations already provide services in this field, the most popular of them being eco-design, Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) and Life Cycle Cost (LCC), carbon footprint and design of sustainable product service systems. The support organisations are in general quite mature and have been providing LC approach services for around five years. They also contribute with publications related to the life cycle oriented environmental products/services they offer, and publish results in conferences or seminar proceedings.

## Expectations and improvement

Four critical needs are raised by the companies:

- More than one third of the responding companies believe that LC tools should be further developed and tailored to the needs of SMEs in order to foster LC approaches in the sector.
- More subsidies, consulting and support for LC approaches are also considered of key importance.
- The companies of the building sector could use more training material and specific knowledge regarding LC approaches as well.
- Last but not least, the involvement of the different actors in the value chain and incrementing research activities would also help in the implementation of LC approaches.

## PERSPECTIVES

- ⇒ There is **much activity around sustainable building**, but few real implementations. The initiative to promote more sustainable solutions is dependent of the building companies, but there are **few clients who ask for sustainable solutions** and, in an even lesser degree, ask for sustainable buildings.
- ⇒ **Regulatory and normative** context plays a very important role in the implementation of life cycle approaches by building companies. Regulation is considered to be a key driver in this particular sector as it is quite demanding and companies are forced to be more environmentally friendly in order to comply..
- ⇒ **Public procurement schemes** and conversion to **market mechanisms** are becoming the backbone of the momentum of the government towards a green demand and an innovative supply.
- ⇒ The introduction of **mandatory energy certification of buildings** as a condition to sell or rent a building is stimulating some demand for the development of sustainable construction.
- ⇒ There is also an opportunity for the building sector in the **development of knowledge, skills and competences** of workers in the construction industry through mechanisms of accreditation and training/qualification in different subjects (building techniques, marketing and communication, management, etc.) for different types of agents.
- ⇒ Regarding the insufficient access to **LCA data and tools**, the issue may be overcome by mutualizing efforts. Physical and online resource centres are developed in LCiP project and can contribute to tackling this issue.
- ⇒ Another point raised by companies is the lack of case studies showing the concrete added value of developing Life Cycle approaches in the building sector. Promoting **success stories** and case studies (some will be developed within the framework of LCiP) in events and through networks is a good way to attract companies.
- ⇒ In this line, further efforts should be encouraged in order for companies to **externally communicate** their LC practices.
- ⇒ There is a need for **collaborative approaches throughout the supply chain**, in order to develop Life cycle approaches in the building sector. Regarding the end of life stage, for example, the building sector is dependent on the waste managers.

For further **information on Life Cycle approaches?**  
Please visit LCiP website: [www.lifelcip.eu](http://www.lifelcip.eu)  
(More information on the maturity assessment in the section “[mapping maturity](#)”)