

CEMBUREAU's response to The Guardian's 'Concrete Week'

27 February 2019 - The Guardian newspaper features a series of articles this week, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation and the "100 Resilient Cities" project. The objective is to "celebrate the aesthetic and social achievements of concrete while investigating its innumerable harms" (says The Guardian).

A lot has happened the past few days...

With titles such as "Concrete chokes our landfill sites", "Brutal beauty" or "Concrete tipping us in climate catastrophe", The Guardian seems to be on a mission that ignores basic principles of good journalism, including fact checking, need for objectivity and a balanced approach. Its articles blame concrete for all the sins in the world, including poor spatial planning, corruption in the construction sector and poor maintenance of built structures. In the latest article, it even reads that concrete "has lost its "transformative aura" due to its links with socialism ». If it were not sad and damaging to our sector, it would be hilarious.

The cement and concrete industry does not turn a blind eye on the fact that cement manufacturing is an energy - and CO₂ intensive process, but the sector is taking up its responsibility. The industry is investing in a wide range of process innovation technologies, including the search for new binders, the increased use of alternative fuels (Europe is the leader globally with a 44% replacement of fossil fuels by alternative fuels sourced from a variety of waste streams) and research on different CO₂ capture technologies with different projects in the pilot and demonstration phase.

These are stories worth telling, as are the stories about the wonders of concrete, which is a low carbon product that mainly consists of water and aggregates and 10-15% of cement. Concrete's thermal mass allows buildings to keep a stable temperature and reduces the need for air conditioning and heating (therewith reduces CO₂), its durability allows for a strong CO₂ performance over the lifecycle of the built infrastructure, and its recyclability puts us right on the circular economy agenda. A recent scientific study demonstrates that up to 25% of process emissions can be reabsorbed over the lifetime of a building and upon its demolition, thus turning cities into carbon sinks.

We would hope and think that the "100 Resilient cities" project is interested in these positive benefits of concrete which are a key enabling material to put society on the sustainable transition path (energy efficient housing, renewable infrastructure, transport infrastructure). We trust to see more of this covered in what is left of the Guardian Concrete week.

About CEMBUREAU: The European Cement Association based in Brussels is the representative organisation of the cement industry in Europe. Currently, its Full Members are the national cement industry associations and cement companies of the European Union (except for Malta and Slovakia) plus Norway, Switzerland and Turkey. Croatia and Serbia are Associate Members of CEMBUREAU. A cooperation agreement has been concluded with Vassiliko Cement in Cyprus and with the Ukrainian Cement Association (Ukrcement).

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