



### Peer Reviewed

**Title:**

USGBC GreenBuild 2004 [Dispatches]

**Journal Issue:**

[Places, 17\(1\)](#)

**Author:**

[Baum, Mara](#)

**Publication Date:**

2005

**Publication Info:**

Places

**Permalink:**

<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/3h05j2f8>

**Acknowledgements:**

This article was originally produced in Places Journal. To subscribe, visit [www.places-journal.org](http://www.places-journal.org). For reprint information, contact [places@berkeley.edu](mailto:places@berkeley.edu).

**Keywords:**

places, placemaking, architecture, environment, landscape, urban design, public realm, planning, design, GreenBuild, dispatches, Green Building Council, Portland, Oregon, USGBC, Mara Baum

**Copyright Information:**

All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author or original publisher for any necessary permissions. eScholarship is not the copyright owner for deposited works. Learn more at [http://www.escholarship.org/help\\_copyright.html#reuse](http://www.escholarship.org/help_copyright.html#reuse)



**eScholarship**  
University of California

eScholarship provides open access, scholarly publishing services to the University of California and delivers a dynamic research platform to scholars worldwide.

# GreenBuild 2004

Mara Baum

global public space as soon as the first plane hit on 9/11. We cannot escape public space, so we have no choice but to understand it.

Shibley then asked if the fear or misunderstanding of public space comes from a paucity in the language we use in talking about it. Were we to talk about social space in all of its diversity, rather than the somewhat singular idea of public space, we would have a better understanding of it. Such space would certainly not remain, as Miller said, what is left over from what the law defines as private property. Understanding the social gradients of public space, added Trieb, would help us see that it can happen anywhere, on public or private property.

Likewise, the fear of public space can be addressed, said Moya, by seeing it as a way for us to deal with our cultural differences. It is a place, said Olin, in which a variety of people can meet in safety. The symposium ended with a recognition of the paradoxical nature of public space in our time: people fear such space because they feel vulnerable in it; yet they need it more than ever, for it will enable them to interact with others and overcome that fear.

It may sometimes seem that everything worthwhile has been either privatized or mediated, but we should not be fooled. How we deal with the public good globally will determine whether or not this century will be more peaceful or more war-torn than the last. And how we deal with public space locally will determine whether or not our communities will be more united or more divided than in the past. Public space may, in the end, be the ultimate barometer of our civilization, the gauge against which we can measure whether we are a country or just a collection of individuals living in fear of one another. For all of our good, let us hope it is not the latter.

Few professional organizations grow by over 1,000 percent in just four years, but the U.S. Green Building Council has gained such momentum. More than 8,000 people attended its three-day annual conference (known as the GreenBuild Expo) in Portland, Oregon, last year. That represented a 90 percent increase from the first such event in 2002. This year, USGBC anticipates an attendance of more than 10,000 at its 2005 meeting in Atlanta.

USGBC has now become the leading national organization to promote and educate green building, and GreenBuild has become the must-go conference for industry professionals. Meanwhile, the council's growth in numbers has led to a parallel growth in vision and scope. Today the USGBC's membership and influence are spreading both beyond the United States and beyond buildings.

## Major Initiatives

Founded in 1993, USGBC today represents a coalition of 5,300 member organizations, including professional firms, government agencies, product manufacturers, research institutions, universities, and nonprofits. Its mission is nothing less than to transform the construction industry to embrace high-performance green building standards.

USGBC's primary product to date has been the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating system, a means to measure and define high-performance buildings. USGBC released a pilot version LEED for new construction in 1999. It now has LEED versions for new construction, existing buildings, and commercial interiors. And today several other LEED programs, including one for neighborhood development, are under development.

The LEED system has already demonstrated how USGBC, as a

broad-based coalition, can leverage its diverse knowledge and collective power to change the industry. As of August 2004, 195 million square feet of new construction had either achieved LEED certification or was in the process of doing so.

The GreenBuild Expo is USGBC's second major initiative. This year's GreenBuild covered a variety of subject matter, including architecture, urban design, mechanical engineering, interior design, planning and public health. Attendees at the Nov. 10-12 event were able to choose between a dozen attractions, including the expo floor with 480 exhibitors, a master speaker series, and ten simultaneous learning sessions.

The educational sessions included such diverse topics as "Sustainable Housing in a Global Context"; "Green From the Developer's Standpoint"; "Are We Poisoning Our Progeny?"; "Waste is Food' — Integrating Waste Recovery into the Construction Process"; and "Visionary and Applied Approaches to Sustainable Design and New Urbanism." But more than one-fifth of the sixty learning sessions at the recent conference (an average of two per time slot) discussed planning, urban design, or global issues beyond the scope of a conventional architect or mechanical engineer. Such breadth showed how USGBC is attempting to communicate the need for sustainability at all scales — from that of the building component to that of global resources.

## Welcoming the Chinese

Attendance by representatives of the Ministry of Construction of the People's Republic of China at this year's GreenBuild emphasized the conference's increasing global importance. With more than 2 billion square meters of new space built each year, China has become one of the

world's largest construction markets.

At the conference, Vice Minister Qiu Baoxing unveiled a dramatic green building program aimed at reducing China's energy consumption by 65 percent by 2020. To meet this ambitious goal, the program would essentially rebuild or reshape a sizable portion — 25 percent in large cities — of existing Chinese buildings, completely overhaul the way new buildings are built, and power 80 million square meters of space with photovoltaics and other renewable energy sources.

Baoxing and other Chinese speakers at GreenBuild encouraged American and European green-building firms to work in China — though they suggested that Western companies should focus on understanding Chinese culture before jumping into the market. To get their initiative started, the Ministry of Construction is also planning a new National Green Building Innovation Award, and it is sponsoring a March 2005 “International Intelligent and Green Building Technologies and Products Conference & Expo” in Beijing.

China has serious environmental problems, and its government clearly realizes that it must move swiftly to curtail them. What is not clear, however, is whether China will have the political will and technical capacity to attain its goals. As professionals in the United States and elsewhere have learned, there is much difficult ground between discussing broad-based green policies and implementing green-building programs on the ground.

Only time will tell what the outcome will be in China, but a few projects do give a reason to hope. Though not energy-related, the “Canal Restorer” on the Baima Canal in Southern China was arguably one of the most successful out-of-the-box international case studies presented at GreenBuild. On an urban stretch

of canal, Ocean Arks International of Burlington, Vermont, designed and installed a floating walkway system to treat waste generated by an equivalent of 12,000 people. The walkway employs a lining of plants and microorganisms that naturally breaks down the effluent, allowing a once-fetid waterway to be transformed into a pleasant, urban garden that showcases more than twenty species of native Chinese wetland plants. This project demonstrates how China has the potential to leapfrog over the conventional infrastructure projects of the developed world, moving straight to more ecologically intelligent systems.

#### Other International Initiatives

Though China dominated the international scene at GreenBuild 2004, their representatives were far from the only foreign presence. Conference participants came from 22 nations, including a handful of representatives to the World Green Building Council.

Formed two years ago by David Gottfried, a founder of the USGBC, the World Green Building Council is “a federation... of national Green Building Councils whose common goal is the sustainable transformation of the global property industry.” It has grown to include the councils from Australia, Brazil, Japan, Spain, India, Canada, the United States, and, most recently, Mexico (whose representatives announced the formation of the Mexico Green Building Council at GreenBuild 2004).

China is also in the process of forming a national green building organization, with the eventual goal of joining the World Green Building Council. But, overall, China had to share much of the international limelight at this year's meeting with India. At the meeting, USGBC announced it had both signed a LEED licensing

agreement with India and awarded a LEED platinum rating to the ITC Group of India. Platinum is the highest achievement within the LEED system. Interestingly, of the seven platinum buildings in the world, two are in India.

#### Growing Pains

Expansion in membership, scope and vision will undoubtedly help the USGBC attain its goals, but it will not come without some controversy. Some industry professionals, for example, believe that the organization has become too commercial. They claim that individual product manufacturers are too visible, and that GreenBuild has become one large advertisement.

In parallel, this past year the USGBC came close to granting trade associations membership status. Though ultimately defeated, this measure would have given veto power to organizations whose primary role is to increase market share for the products they represent.

Another troubling development is that internal organizational dynamics and market changes have delayed the release of a new version of the LEED rating system for new construction for several years — at the same time that the current version is becoming outdated and inadequate. These challenges are necessary hurdles in the growth of what has become a dynamic organization, and they will continue to play out over the next few years.

#### Resources

US Green Building Council <http://www.usgbc.org>  
World Green Building Council <http://www.worldgbc.org>  
GreenBuild Expo <http://www.greenbuildexpo.org>