

# Models for sustainable design

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# MODELS FOR SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

Switzerland is a diverse and close-knit cultural landscape, a living environment with a high quality of life that should be preserved for future generations. The Swiss Society of Engineers and Architects (SIA) is convinced that this can only happen if new standards are set for the design of this living environment in the future. With "Umsicht—Regards—Sguardi 2011", the SIA awards prizes for the second time to carefully executed works at the cutting edge of sustainable design. To accompany the awards, the SIA has also formulated a series of standards that it believes can safeguard sustainable design for the future.

But what precisely is "Umsicht—Regards—Sguardi" (= circumspection), the award for sustainable design of the living environment? It might be simpler and more readily understandable to call it the sustainability award of the SIA. When "Umsicht—Regards—Sguardi" was first held back in 2006/07, however, the term "sustainability" was consciously avoided. After all, many companies have long since made sustainability a component of their PR strategy, one that is difficult to verify in terms of substance. In contrast, "Umsicht" or "Circumspection" denotes a position and an agenda which, as we will show, can be thoroughly scrutinised.

## EXHIBITION

### "UMSICHT—REGARDS—SGUARDI"

The award-winning works can be viewed by a wide audience in a travelling exhibition. Opening on the day of the Award Ceremony on 3 March 2011, the exhibition will run for approximately two years, stopping off at various colleges and educational institutions in Switzerland and abroad. The exhibition has been developed in collaboration with the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta) of the Department of Architecture (D-ARCH) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH).  
03.03.–18.03.2011: ETH Main Hall, Zurich  
28.03.–14.04.2011: ETH Campus Höggerberg, Zurich  
25.05.–03.06.2011: Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Horw  
19.06.–02.08.2011: Monastery Disentis  
16.08.–31.08.2011: Museum of Architecture East Switzerland, St. Gallen  
04.09.–09.09.2011: World Engineers' Convention 2011, Geneva  
22.09.–14.10.2011: Bern University of Applied Sciences, Burgdorf  
21.10.–05.11.2011: Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (EPFL)  
24.11.–23.12.2011: Università della Svizzera italiana, Mendrisio  
17.01.–21.01.2012: Swissbau, Basel

## WEBSITE

Further information about "Umsicht—Regards—Sguardi 2011" can be found at [www.sia.ch/umsicht](http://www.sia.ch/umsicht), including the full report by the jury and short documentary films by Marc Schwarz about the award-winning projects and their creators. The site also publishes continuously updated information about the travelling exhibition, including details of the location and duration of the exhibition at each stop-off. There is also a media coverage section on the website including all television, newspaper and radio reports about "Umsicht—Regards—Sguardi".

## ACTING WITH VISION

In the first instance, however, circumspection—or careful action—simply means action that uses a holistic approach and a variety of viewpoints to find solutions. Careful action spans disciplines and has no ideological agenda. Circumspection is thus the opposite of tunnel vision, which considers only partial disciplines, aspects and systems, focusing on special interests as well as on short-term profit. Careful action therefore means acting with consideration for the welfare of future generations. Careful action is sustainable action.

But what precisely makes a work sustainable? How can a careful approach be measured? And who should be the judge of it? First of all, the "Umsicht" jury should represent the broadest possible spectrum of technical and practical knowledge. With 15 personalities from the fields of architecture, engineering, urban development, regional planning, culture, sustainability, media, politics and economics (see box, p. 9), the composition of the jury meets this primary requirement.

## SIX EVALUATION CRITERIA

The standards by which the sustainability of a work would be judged also needed to be carefully defined. At the preliminary meeting in spring 2010, the jury concluded that the six evaluation criteria used in 2006/07 had worked well and merely needed a little more precision in their descriptions. The definitive criteria that were included in the call for submissions and would be used by the jury to evaluate the sustainability of the projects submitted in the autumn were as follows:

- *Groundbreaking nature:* The work is groundbreaking in nature and considered a model for future developments. At the same time it offers exemplary and creative responses to issues relevant to the future.
- *Transdisciplinarity:* The work is the result of a solution by an interdisciplinary team. It captures the complexity of the underlying issue. It considers different perspectives on the issue and combines available knowledge with state-of-the-art technology.





01 Presentation and discussion of the projects during the adjudication (photo: Michael Mathis)

- *Social relevance and compatibility:* The work takes account of present and future social challenges. It safeguards and encourages opportunities to participate in society. Its effects are socially compatible and they contribute to the common good or a solution geared towards it, but not at the expense of future generations.
- *Environmental responsibility:* The work takes account of environmental requirements throughout its life cycle. It contributes to the conservation and enhancement of a high-quality living environment.
- *Economic performance:* The work satisfies needs while conserving resources. It has long-term value and is commercially viable and attractive to suppliers and consumers throughout its life cycle. It promotes economic participation.
- *Cultural achievement and aesthetic quality:* The work embodies a cultural achievement. It meets high creative standards, creating a sense of identification and enthusiasm.

#### A BROAD SPECTRUM OF PROJECTS

The jury was thus looking for works of different sizes that represent an exemplary or unexpected and creative approach to the environment: works that make a special contribution to the sustainability of the design of the Swiss living environment, as forerunners of future developments and/or due to their scope. By the submission deadline at the beginning of August 2010, the people in charge of the procedure had received 48 works from freelance SIA professionals and authorities as well as from institutional and private clients. The spectrum of works was very broad, just as it was four years ago, ranging from architectural and engineering operations through planning and development tools to models for the management of buildings. The submissions included works for a single family as well as planning processes affecting whole regions. The differences between the individual works became even clearer from the amounts invested in the projects, which ranged from less than 100,000 Swiss francs to more than 4 billion.



**JURY**

Prof. Daniel Kündig, architect ETH SIA BSA, SIA President, Zurich (Chairman)  
 Prof. Manfred Hegger, architect BDA, Dipl.-Ing. M. Sc. Econ., Kassel  
 Hans-Georg Bächtold, forestry engineer ETH SIA, SIA General Secretary, Zurich  
 Prof. Valentin Bearth, architect ETH SIA, Director of the Accademia di architettura Mendrisio (USI), Chur and Mendrisio  
 Dr. Regula Bochsler, Managing Editor, Kultur Aktuell, Swiss Television SF, Zurich  
 Pia Durisch, architect ETH SIA OTIA, Durisch+Nolli Architetti Sagl, Lugano  
 Prof. Christophe Girod, architect and landscape architect, Institute of Landscape Architecture (ILA), D-ARCH, ETH Zurich  
 Dr. Thomas Held, until September 2010 Director of Avenir Suisse, Zurich  
 Fritz Kobi, civil engineer ETH SIA SVI, former Chief District Engineer, Canton of Bern, Münsingen  
 Prof. Dr. Susanne Kytzia, economist, Director of the Infrastructure and Living Environment Coordination Office of the HSR, Rapperswil  
 Dr. Maria Lezzi, Director of the Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE, Bern  
 Daniel Meyer, civil engineer ETH SIA SWB, Dr. Lüchinger+Meyer Bauingenieure AG, member of the SIA directorate, Zurich  
 Dr. Rudolf Rechsteiner, economist, member of the National Council until May, Basel  
 Prof. Dr. Jean-Louis Scartezini, EPFL, Director of the Solar Energy and Building Physics Laboratory (LESO-PB), Lausanne  
 Nelly Wenger, civil engineer EPFL, Strategic management of complex projects, Nelly Wenger Associates, Zurich/Lausanne  
 Deputy: Pius Flury, architect ETH SIA, Solothurn, member of the SIA directorate

**PARTNERS**

ingenious switzerland  
 Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC)  
 Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA)  
 Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich (ETH Zürich)  
 Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Lausanne (EPFL)  
 Specialised Conference of Technology, Architecture and Life Sciences (FTAL)  
 Università della Svizzera italiana  
 Unesco – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  
 Exhibition partner: Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta)

**MEDIA PARTNERS**

Swiss Radio and Television  
 TEC21 – Fachzeitschrift für Architektur, Ingenieurwesen und Umwelt  
 TRACÉS – Bulletin technique de la Suisse romande  
 archi – la rivista della Svizzera italiana che si occupa di architettura, ingegneria e urbanistica

**PROCEDURAL SUPPORT**

neubighubacher, Strukturentwicklung Städtebau  
 Architektur, Cologne-Bern

**DISTINCTION AS A QUALITY STANDARD**

At a two-day session in October 2010, the jury made an initial assessment of the submitted works and selected twelve of them for more detailed consideration after two elimination rounds. Over the next three weeks, all of the works on this shortlist were visited by three or four members of the jury. On the third and final jury day in November 2010, the jury ultimately awarded prizes to six works and acknowledged two others. The eight works described in detail in this dossier clearly show that sustainable design is possible and sensible today.

This is the most important message to society as a whole, to investors, authorities, administrators, politicians and planning professionals.

At the same time, however, "Umsicht" emphasises the important role that the SIA members play in designing the living environment. It was a criterion for entry that at least one SIA member was involved in each of the submitted projects, yet fortunately this was not an obstacle because there are very few civil engineering projects in Switzerland not involving at least one SIA member. The presence of SIA professionals shows both their importance for the design of the living environment and their responsibility for it. The SIA therefore aims to use the award to set quality standards for the work of its members, by showing what can be achieved and which direction to take. But, as the award-winning projects emphatically prove, "Umsicht" also shows that many SIA professionals are already acting sustainably.

**SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS TO SERVE AS MODELS**

What "Umsicht" cannot and will not provide, however, are formulas that are easy to imitate and reproduce, because each of the award-winning works is a specific and distinctive response to an individual, context-related issue. Each work demonstrates an exemplary process and solution, which makes it a model with much to teach those who understand the complexities of its context. But they are not a sure formula for success.

What is more, the pioneering spirit recognised in the works is somewhat fleeting, as is made particularly clear by the evaluation criterion of "groundbreaking nature". What may be universally praised as the groundbreaking nature of a work today should ideally be standard practice tomorrow. In perpetual interaction with their spatial, social and economic environment, the works constantly change, as does the way in which they are assessed. The awards should therefore not be regarded as a definitive verdict but as a forecast: one that the SIA will regularly measure against reality in the future. Fortunately, the review of the ten award-winning and acknowledged works from 2006/07 showed that almost all were more effective than originally forecast.

The results of these reviews enable the SIA to continuously reassess, enhance and optimise the award-winning works as part of an ongoing process. This in turn constantly highlights sustainable, exemplary solutions that inspire professionals and the interested public alike to take careful action.

**EXTENSIVE DOCUMENTATION**

In order to achieve this objective, the results should also be presented as carefully as possible—the name "Circumspection" (= "Umsicht") says it all. The graphical illustrations provided by the project authors and the short texts by Charles von Büren based on the jury's assessment were accompanied by expressive images by the internationally renowned art photographer, Jules Spinatsch. The travelling exhibition that brings the works to places throughout Switzerland and in neighbouring countries also includes short films by the filmmaker Marc Schwarz. Both the photographer and the filmmaker were explicitly asked to examine the award-winning works in their own way and to document them through their means of expression. The short films, which can also be seen online, offer those involved in the projects as well as the members of the jury another chance to have their say. The SIA hopes that these different perspectives will present "Umsicht 2011" to the readers and exhibition visitors in a diverse, exciting and inspiring way.