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The French make sustainability more fun

1 October, 2013 | By [Hattie Hartman](#)



Hattie Hartman reports back from the second annual 'OFF du Développement Durable'

Last week I attended the second annual 'OFF du Développement Durable' (OFF du DD – rough translation: the 'fringe' of sustainable design), an informative and entertaining conference in Paris. The predominant message of the day-long event was profound scepticism of certification badges (*les 'labels'*) and the need to go beyond labels to develop a more performative architecture.

The conference was organised by five green design associations: two in Paris and one each in Lyon, Marseilles and Reunion Island, and the event took place simultaneously in all four locations, with a shared live Twitter feed. Think the RIBA Sustainable Futures Group meets the Association of Energy Conscious Builders, the Centre for Alternative Technology and the Scottish Environmental Design Association, with an Australian green group thrown in. Where is the appetite for this type of collaboration on our side of the Channel? Well, at least we've got London-based Green Sky Thinking week, organised by Open-City.

According to organiser Dominique Ingold, of Paris sustainability consultancy CP&O (Conseils, Programmation et Organisation), the purpose of the OFF du DD is knowledge-sharing. The collective learning which comes from showcasing exemplar projects advances green design by showing what is possible and how it has been achieved.

The OFF du DD's call for projects yielded 123 submissions, of which 32 were presented at the conference in a three-minute video. Projects were grouped according to familiar themes, such as sustainable neighbourhoods, bio-materials, natural ventilation and air quality, and retrofit. A rapid-fire Q&A with representatives of the project teams followed.

Standout projects included Bruno Rollet's social housing with willow balustrades, rooftop allotments and greenhouses south-east of Paris at Vitry-sur-Seine; a group of eight Passivhaus residences in Paris 20eme by Atelier Pascal Gontier; a temporary 'recyclerie' by RozO architects to be completed in December, also in Paris 20eme; a proposal for an eco-quartier in the northeastern Parisian suburb of Aubervilliers by Atelier Philippe Madec scheduled to go on site in 2015, and Cave de l'Oeuf, an egg-shaped wine store near Dijon made entirely of natural materials by AZCA (Atelier Zéro Carbone Architectes).

At the OFF du DD, a refreshing array of projects was presented with a light touch and debated with humour. Paul King of

the UK Green Building Council often says the way forward for sustainable design is to make it more appealing. BIG's Bjarke Ingels has coined the term 'hedonsitic' sustainability to sell his eye-catching projects.

It's hard to say whether France or the UK is leading the way in green design, but a degree of levity lacking in the UK permeated both the tone and the projects of the OFF du DD. There is definitely mutual benefit to be had from an increased flow of ideas across the Channel. Green drinks (Google ICEB café) take place at the Maison de l'Architecture in Paris on the last Monday of every month.

For a synopsis of projects presented at the OFF du DD 2013, visit www.leoffdd.fr

