

DGNB Diamond Certification for Middelfart City Hall Explores New Standards in Sustainability

As the first building in Denmark to receive the new DGNB Diamond certification – A standard focusing exclusively on architectural beauty and functionality – The Middelfart City Hall shows how community-focused architecture and sustainability go hand in hand

Based on a review from a panel of three architectural critics, the Danish Green Building Council awarded the new DGNB Diamond certification to our Middelfart City Hall in September 2018, making it the first building in Denmark to receive such recognition and adding to the building's DGNB Platinum certification for sustainability.

The introduction of the DGNB Diamond certification standard represents an effort to maintain comprehensive, modern metrics of sustainability. Existing DGNB sustainability awards, available in Denmark since the Green Building Council adapted the German system in 2011, gauged sustainability by more quantitative metrics: Utility consumption levels, incorporation of renewable building materials and reliance on renewable energy. The DGNB Diamond certification pilot program launched in spring 2017, developed in collaboration between the Danish Green Building Council, the Danish Association of Architects and the Danish Association of Architectural Firms. With this new standard, the evaluation process broadens to consider a building's longevity and sustained appeal within a community.

Rethinking sustainability

For Martha Lewis, Senior Architect and DGNB Auditor with Henning Larsen, DGNB Diamond certification opens a new angle on our understanding of sustainable architecture.

"A lot of buildings in Germany and Denmark were getting top scores in official sustainability, but was it good architecture? Were the newly certified buildings working well contextually? Were they a positive addition to the communities they were coming into? To be able to promote sustainability when the quality of architecture was questionable seemed somewhat insufficient," Lewis said.

To be eligible for a DGNB Diamond certification a building must first earn a DGNB certification for sustainability, evaluating elements such as economic impact, social benefit, environmentally conscious construction and technical inclusion of elements such as solar energy and low-impact building materials. Diamond certification extends this evaluation to measure a building's longevity in relation to its architectural and aesthetic quality, judging whether the resources behind the project will serve the greater community for years to come. This promotes a new understanding of sustainability: Beyond judging the immediate use of resources, DGNB Diamond certification gauges the building's sustainability in terms of its service life.

“If your building isn’t contextually well-situated, if the interior isn’t functional and clear, and if your details are poorly designed, that building is going not going to have a long and valuable life. So you’ve invested all these resources, but you don’t have the duration,” Lewis said. “I think Diamond certification is a successful attempt to come up with a means to quantify good architecture in a way that considers beauty and durability.”

Designing for longevity

DGNB Diamond certification standards evaluate a building by three main metrics: Context, functionality and details. Context evaluates how well a building fits within its community, and the way that it works in relation to other public spaces or important areas within the city. Functionality measures how well the building works toward its designed purpose – If it fosters communal space, supports accessibility and ease of use. Details gauge artistic stylings within the building and similar small touches, such as how the materials used in the construction will weather over time. In all, the categories seek to encourage architects to design spaces that will sustain their communities over time, ensuring a long and functional service life.

“Middelfart is Denmark’s green growth community, and that also applies to construction as we contribute to the green movement. With this new city hall, we have as a municipality taken responsibility and proven that public buildings can be both sustainable, beautiful and communal. We have built an open workplace with the highest standards of sustainability and working atmosphere, and at the same time created a gathering place and cultural center when working hours are over. In all respects, this is a building with meaning,” Middelfart Mayor Johannes Lundsryd Jensen said.

We are honored to have designed the first building in Denmark to receive this award, and to contribute to developing our global understanding and practices in sustainability. Middelfart City Hall is a testament to the importance of creating community-focused spaces for a sustainable future.