

Green Buildings in Athens, Greece - With DCarbon's Charalampos G. Transcript

Introduction ([00:02](#)):

Welcome to agree. Building matters. The podcast that matters for green building professionals. Learn insight in green buildings as we interview today's experts in LEED and WELL. We'll learn from their career paths, war stories and all things green because green building matters and now our hosts and yes, he has every LEED and WELL credential. Here's Charlie Cichetti.

Charlie ([00:33](#)):

Be sure to check out the green building matters community where you can have unlimited exam prep for any of the professional credential exams you're tackling next as well as putting your continued education on autopilot, saving time with GPS reporting your hours on your behalf. Check it out. [Gbes.Com/Join](#). Now enjoy this episode of the green building matters podcast. Hi everyone. Welcome to the next episode of the green building matters podcast. I love interviewing green building professionals, some from all over the world. Today, we have a recently minted LEED Fellow from Athens Greece. We've got Charalampos. How are you doing today? Hi. Hi, Charlie, I'm fine. Thanks for the invitation. Really great to be here with you today. I've not been to Athens, Greece yet. You've already convinced me. I need to come soon. We are recording this in the middle of the pandemic, but Hey man, I'm going to be there soon, but tell us a little more about your background. So where did you grow up and where'd you go to school?

Charalampos ([01:34](#)):

Actually, I was born in Athens, so I've grown up here in Athens. I've spent the majority of my last year in Athens. I studied art fiction as a degree originally. I moved to London, UK to do my master degrees in environmental design and engineering. My sustainability approach started there in London, UK, thanks to my master's studies. It was then when I completed my studies and started working in London for IBIS Architects, a global architectural firm as the sustainability coordinator for the London office. So I've been actually doing professional sustainability for the whole of my professional life. I've never done (inaudible).

Charlie ([02:25](#)):

When you were studying and getting those advanced degrees was all about BRE and BREEAM, or was it just green buildings? What was the curriculum like?

Charalampos ([02:34](#)):

Originally at the masters studying sadly it was not related to any particular rating system. It was really about sustainability, energy efficiency and the topics around that. We were not involved at that time in any particular sustainability benchmarking system.

Charlie ([02:52](#)):

I'm always curious. Okay. So then you got that position and it was sustainability. Was it focused more on some of those early projects you worked on? Some of those early clients, was it energy efficiency or at that time, were clients wanting to get a plaque to validate, "Hey, we did this the right way." When did the certification start coming into play?

Charalampos ([03:15](#)):

I would say that certification thing, we started quite early enough because actually during one of my first involvement when I was a sustainability coordinator at this London office, we were involved, I was actually part of the project teams. Certain projects actually were being developed in the UAE and were at the same time pursuing LEED certification. So that was actually originally the first time that I came across LEED. I'm also sometimes brilliant because I was also involved in some UK projects for which BM certification was mandatory. So it was at that point actually, when I realized that it's really good to talk about sustainability, but it's even better when you can actually prove in a transparent way that you're building sustainability. Sustainable certifications have actually succeeded in proving people so that the results of sustainability in a very transparent way.

Charlie ([04:19](#)):

Oh, thank you. I'm always curious because these are great rating systems, great tools that you've used, I've used and they've helped our careers. Looking back on your career, architect you did some conceding and I want

to learn more about your firm. Yeah. Did you have any mentors or anyone that really you looked up to long ago?

Charalampos ([04:40](#)):

I wouldn't say however, that I found anybody like a mentor to be supported.

Charlie ([04:48](#)):

Okay. So connect the dots. You're in London, you were practicing, but you're in sustainability. What brought you back to Athens Greece?

Charalampos ([04:57](#)):

Yes. To be honest, I came back to this quite accidentally or I wanted to actually to try and get an opportunity to implement sustainability in Greece. That was actually around 2010. Sustainability was not known in Greece at that time. At that time it was actually when the Greek drama was actually starting the deep recession, economic recession. Although it seems quite strange, it was actually the perfect timing to talk about sustainability at a very hard time in Greece because actually it was the point when the real estate sector was actually starting to collapse. When we talk about collapse, we talk about the entire collapse, almost 95% collapse. So people and especially the most prominent key players of the real estate sector wanted to be differentiated. Actually, we were very easily convinced to invest in sustainability and invest in doing sustainable projects and that sounds quite controversial, but it was a very good time for us to talk about sustainability with them. So I started my own business at that time in Greece, dealing with sustainability real estate and primarily doing LEED certification for prominent projects in the company.

Charlie ([06:24](#)):

Amazing. I love entrepreneurship and sustainability. So tell us about the carbon and your consulting firm there. Tell us a little more about the projects you work on, some of the clients, some of the team that you've grown.

Charalampos ([06:40](#)):

Yes. That's something, we are sustainability consultants. We're not designers, we're not contractors we're simply doing sustainability consulting, primarily people know us for doing LEED. We are doing this kind of project

management work for our clients and whatever involves actually overlooking the LEED implementation during the whole project phase, including designing construction. Besides that we also do some of the members services related to that kind of certification. So sustainability modeling, life cycle analysis and daylight modeling recently also we started actually doing sustainability on a greater scale on a portfolio basis. And this methodology like GRESB has helped us a lot for site direction. But we have also started looking at sustainability from a different aspect, which is closely related to the product manufacturers aspect. We help manufacturers of products, construction products to improve the way they manufacture their projects so that those can be eligible to comply with the requirements LEED and WELL may set.

Charlie ([08:02](#)):

You really chased some opportunities there with how green is your portfolio, to LEED and Frame and some other. Can you tell us a couple of projects that you and your team I've had a lot of fun working on in the region?

Charalampos ([08:18](#)):

Yes, I would say that we have been involved in the vast majority of the projects actually are showing Salesforce offices. So far we have been involved in every single first project in its category, the first goal, the first public, the first platinum. We are very proud because we have factually delivered the first LEED version for ebook data centers in the world, as well as, the first LEED version four data center in Europe, middle East and Asia region. Apparently we are running three mega projects in Greece, which are designed by Renzo piano, building workshop and our three new healthcare facilities, not in Athens, in regional Greece. So we are really happy for these projects. We have also got a new assignment, which is really great for our team. We are very happy about that. It's actually a new airport, which is going to be in Quick Island, and it's going to be the second biggest airport in Greece, with LEED certification.

Charlie ([09:27](#)):

That's amazing. These are great projects. I can tell that you made the right choice to come back to Athens, take that leap of faith and work on some really cool projects. Looking back on your green building career, what are

some other highlights that really stand out? What are some things you're really proud of?

Charalampos ([09:46](#)):

I would say one of the things that I'm really proud of is actually our involvement in one of the very first projects we've ever done and that is actually a kindergarten. That was literally also the first LEED platinum project in Greece. But actually it was really, really important that our involvement there actually created the opportunity for people, for very young people, the children that were going to the kindergarten to actually come into contact with sustainability, so that they can be really effective in the way they are going to live and they are going to actually use their environment. And that was really important that we're really proud to start because actually we saw that this building is actually fitting for young people.

Charlie ([10:40](#)):

That's such a cool project. Now, those are very meaningful for the community projects and then getting those young kids exposed to sustainability is important. And now LEED Fellow status here tells us what that has meant to you.

Charalampos ([10:56](#)):

LEED Fellow. , This is, I'm really, I'm very happy. I'm excited that actually I have been accepted as a LEED Fellow because I think that after 10 years of involvement with the green building industry this is a normal for me because I feel that people, I mean from the US (inaudible) recognized my personal commitment to the green building industry because we've done quite, I would say very hard work in Greece during the last 10 years. As I told you, Greece has actually recently come out from a very hard decade. We've done a lot of work towards sustainability and convincing people why sustainability is important and besides that, actually we've managed to not only to convince clients, but also to educate people and this is even more important because during this process we've managed to educate designers and also contractors to what's a more sustainable approach of designing, constructing buildings and this is really important.

Charlie ([12:04](#)):

Very, very important and I'm trying to see what's next. I love asking my podcast guests Charalampos what are you studying now? What do you think we should be prepared for? What's coming around the corner in the green building movement?

Charalampos ([12:22](#)):

That's a really good question. Although none of us, I think, can be really sure about what's coming next, of course the obvious answer is that we can see the evolution of the health issues. Of course, this is something that was really well known within the green building industry that has been very apparent due to the pandemic outbreak, of course. We can also see a connection of the economics with green buildings, which has been more apparent nowadays. People are becoming less suspicious about why we are doing that green because usually we can see that the baseline is now green and people are looking actually for what's next. So they are looking for even higher standards than simply doing. For example, LEED has been taken for granted so far, especially for the most prominent part of the real estate sector. People now are looking for the next levels. I think that self is one of the biggest challenges for the future.

Charlie ([13:34](#)):

I agree with everything you've said. What about health? What about healthy buildings? It was already really warming up over the last three, four or five years with WELL and FITWELL. And maybe you could argue that BRE or BREEAM had some of this already, but tell us what's happening now in your region. Is it important to get a certification that yes, this is a healthy building or was it still more about best practices, not just a green building, but a healthy building. How's that going where you are?

Charalampos ([14:06](#)):

Yeah, it's a tough factual discussion so far, because I think that this discussion is even harder than simply doing sustainability because it goes harder to the core of the businesses. It's not about the project development, it's not about technical specifications, only. It's about talking to HR departments, for example, fallouts companies, forty-five buildings, because they are the ones who need to really understand the importance and the very term of such an investment to their economics. What is even more

challenging is actually when trying to connect the dots to this discussion to persuade them in economic terms. So they really need to understand how they are going to get their money and this is a very hard discussion because usually the connection between actually investing and features that will make the building healthier is not really directly converted into payback credit.

Charalampos ([15:08](#)):

So there is an indirect connection which has to become very clear and people have to come to feel very safe about the money they are going to invest or was this direction and this is a very tough question. People need to be very well educated, need to be passionate, need actually to be keeping certain incentives and they will say from my experience that these incentives have to come from the banking institutions. So then the lenders people need to actually be able to get, let's say, cheaper money for their investments because of the fact that these buildings are equipped with center characteristics.

Charlie ([15:47](#)):

Yeah, you're right. The business case, too. Yes. you should just do it for the right reasons but sometimes in the business case it's gonna help everything move faster. Let's talk about projects again and in your region because I think you do work all over Europe. What might make LEED. We've got a lot of listeners on the podcast that are LEED professionals. What makes LEED maybe a little harder to do in your region or has that become a little easier to do these days? So tell us, are there any difficulties applying the LEED rating system in your area?

Charalampos ([16:21](#)):

To me, actually, I can say that LEED is difficult. Actually. What is success? What is the key for a successful LEED, is actually to engage the process as early as possible. We've seen that the most beneficial decisions for the project are those which are made early enough. Actually those who are really made early enough will require many more resources. I would say it's not a matter of resources, it is a matter of approach. The earlier we engage the project on the subject process, the easier the process is going to be, and I would say that actually, thanks to local legislation is becoming even

stricter and people also becoming more educated, very mature procurement and manufacturing are becoming also more and more familiar with the processes. We can see that actually any additional capital extended to relate it to LEED processes is becoming even more marginal. So it's simply a matter of process. My personal experience shows that once someone is seriously interested in doing LEED, they will do it in a case. They will try, they will find a way to absorb any additional costs into their budget, they are going to be really happy with that.

Charlie ([17:56](#)):

Oh, that's good to hear that. It's so doable. Sometimes we need to show the business case and there are some VIP clients who say we are going to do it, whatever it takes, we know it's important. Let's talk a little more about you. What do you think is your specialty, your gift?

Charalampos ([18:15](#)):

That's a really hard question because I don't know.

Charlie ([18:20](#)):

If you are asking your colleagues at Deep Carbon, what would they say you're really good at?

Charalampos ([18:25](#)):

Okay. I normally am good at doing the action, taking very crazy decisions. I think usually actually deciding, making certain proposals to clients, for things we've never done before. It's really good that we are constantly having projects where we are doing something the first time in the region. This is something we started with LEED. We started with (inaudible) We started with LEED for certain difficulties for self-care. Actually last year we decided to go for SITES for the first time in Europe. We are now actually dealing with a project pursuing SITES certification for the very first time, not just in Greece, but in Europe. Also we started doing the first WELL projects. I'm not afraid of doing things for the very first time.

Charlie ([19:27](#)):

You might agree with who better to do that. And if the answer is this is close to what we do, we need to try that new rating system try that new program.

Hopefully you have projects and clients that are like, yeah, we need to do this. We're going to learn together. We know we have a relationship with the US Green Building Council and GBCI, and we can get through this together. So yeah. Who better to do that?

Charalampos ([19:52](#)):

I also forgot to talk about parts(?), but we are also doing their first (inaudible) in the Region. So everything that GBCI

Charlie ([20:03](#)):

No, that's fine and then you have that case study and you can apply it to should we do it on future projects. Tell us, do you have any routines or rituals or just good habits?

Charalampos ([20:15](#)):

Yeah, I would say that the only routine I have is actually that I don't have a routine. By saying that actually, what I am meaning is actually when we're talking about projects, which is actually related to the majority of our everyday life, I would say that we don't have any kind of routine because every single project needs a very customized support. We can't really, although we could have, while we have been involved in approximately 60 or 70 projects, I can tell you for sure that every single project requires a very customized approach in order to get successful results. Usually we treat projects like people who are going to the doctor. So you can't really give them the same approach. You have to talk with people involved in the project, understand their needs, and then create a very customized support which is tailor made for their needs.

Charlie ([21:14](#)):

Very thorough. I can tell you really go for it. Let's talk about a bucket list. Obviously now it's a little harder to travel and sometimes adventure, but is there something on your bucket list, maybe travel adventure, just another accomplishment that's important to you? Can you share one or two things?

Charalampos ([21:34](#)):

Yeah. Okay. It's really wow. What is now a bucket list is actually doing to be engaged in the international project teams so that we can have the

opportunity to travel a lot for workshops. Of course this is quite hard nowadays due to the COVID outbreak. Of course this is something we actually do, we try to get the opportunity to travel a lot, even for business, not for vacation.

Charlie ([22:04](#)):

Okay. Where would you like to travel and the business together? I personally love to do that too. Last year I was able to take my wife to Stockholm, to Sweden, the Sweden Green Building Council asked me to come to a two day WELL workshop and it was just amazing. So yes, I love that.

Charalampos ([22:23](#)):

Yeah. It's really a pity that we didn't manage to travel to California this year, but hopefully next year we'll be able to do that in person.

Charlie ([22:34](#)):

We will. I think we will. Tell us one destination. What's one place you've got to get to in the future.

Charalampos ([22:42](#)):

Ideally, actually others have been quite settled times in the US. I've never been able to visit the West coast. Ideally would like to go to California and land actually to San Francisco. And then after spending some days in San Francisco, jumping a car to LA, this is one of my next destinations.

Charlie ([23:03](#)):

That's a good bucket list item. I'm driving down the Pacific coast highway where the Pacific Ocean is right there below you and that is a great drive

Charalampos ([23:12](#)):

As an alternative to that, for any reason, I'm not able to go there. I've definitely head for a safari in India.

Charlie ([23:22](#)):

Good. That's a good backup plan. Let's talk about books you would recommend, and it doesn't even have to be about green buildings, but is there a book you read?

Charalampos ([23:31](#)):

Yeah. Okay. Although, unfortunately, I'm obsessed with books about the green building industry. Recently I had a chance to read a book written by Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism versus the Climate*. Actually this is very provocative because now I'm inclined in the current era for capitalist issues that actually this cannot really be compatible with climate change because actually the current standard, way of living actually results in climate change. However, this is something that we need to find the optimal balance between the way we live in a climate sense, because it can be actually, it can be both a well-balanced.

Charlie ([24:24](#)):

That's good. That's a good perspective. As we start to come to a close two final questions, one is, is there anything you wish you'd known earlier in your career?

Charalampos ([24:33](#)):

Yes. Okay. Yeah. That's a really good question. Actually. This is somehow related to the mentorship thing. Actually, I would have seen it actually, I think that it's really good for us. It's really good for people to understand that usually we feel that we're having burdens around us, but actually are only truly engaged. The boundary, we must continue to push against harder and harder is our own inability to believe that we can create a real and lasting change and this is something that I think is really important.

Charlie ([25:09](#)):

That's good. That's good advice. Let's say there's someone listening to our podcast, our conversation here, and they're new to the green building movement. What words of encouragement do you have for them?

Charalampos ([25:21](#)):

Yeah. Okay. I think that does it for my personal experience. When I started doing this job, dealing with sustainability, sometimes it feels that this topic is

Celtic. You may move, you might be afraid that you are not going to actually to implement or to interest people about what is really, really important is to understand that we need simply to take very small steps, small steps at a time which altogether are going to create an impact, which is going to be after some time, we don't have to be anxious about that, but simply actually sewing a small, small, taking small steps, and those are going to create real and lasting change in the variance.

Charlie ([26:07](#)):

Wow. It doesn't have to be chaotic, take small steps. I hope everyone enjoyed listening to our conversation here.

Charalampos ([26:13](#)):

Simply start doing that? Simply start bits and bytes in the process. Then you are going to find the big picture later on, but don't be afraid of that. It seems sometimes it might be counted, but don't be afraid of that.

Charlie ([26:31](#)):

There's good wisdom there. Thank you for your time. I hope everyone's really enjoyed listening to our conversation here. Everyone connect please online, enjoy the podcast and please share it.

Charalampos ([26:44](#)):

Thank you so much.

Charlie ([26:47](#)):

I just want to say thank you to our loyal listeners. We actually are celebrating over one year here on the green building matters podcast. Me and the entire team are stoked and just so glad to continue to listen every Wednesday morning to a new interview with a green building professional here in this industry, or just some pro tips that we want to make sure that you are getting straight from us straight to you.

Charlie ([27:12](#)):

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