

Introduction

For a long time, we hoped we would be able to navigate the difficulties presented by the corona pandemic and hold the LEHM 2020 conference as planned in Weimar. However, a rapid rise in new cases shortly before the conference made it unavoidable to cancel it. We are therefore all the more pleased to present the conference in the form of these proceedings.

What kind of times are we living in? There are many possible answers, but if I had to single out one aspect, I would say we are living in an era of globalisation. And right now, we are living in a time in which the abstract concept of globalisation has taken on very real proportions for people all over the world.

Covid-19 has shown us that we are all in the same boat. Every person on this earth is faced with dealing with the virus in some way or other. The virus knows no boundaries. It has shown us starkly that we live on this planet together: no single person, country or continent can consider themselves entirely independently of each other.

Our experience of the pandemic should also heighten our awareness of another variable of our globalised world: the climate – which knows even fewer boundaries than a virus.

In mid-2019, a 15-year-old schoolgirl from Sweden started what has since become a global movement: Fridays for Future. The world took notice and became more attentive to environmental issues. By the beginning of 2020, however, it felt as if the movement was slowly ebbing. Then came Covid-19, and crazily enough, hope began to grow again, hope for the environment through our personal experience of changes in nature, real and perceived, and through our own experience of and responses to the consequences of the lockdown.

For a short while the planet came to rest. Many hoped that this could lead to a change of course in politics and society – that less can be more and that it is actually a feasible proposition. So where does environmental protection stand six months on? I fear, unfortunately, that we have not learned much from our direct experience.

Climate change is a reality, and it is unclear to what extent we can truly reverse it. What is certain, however, is that in addition to reducing and being more careful about our consumption of resources and raw materials, and alongside preserving and fostering biodiversity, we must ultimately adapt to the changing climatic conditions.

The abundance of earth as a natural resource, its direct reusability and its natural characteristics make earth building materials predestined for sustainable development and counteracting climate change.

It is all the more important that this happens in the building industry, as one of the greatest contributors to carbon emissions, land consumption and the sealing of the soil. The industry is therefore in an unparalleled position to make a major contribution to conserving resources, building sustainably and promoting biodiversity.

The advantages of earth as a building material are undisputed. Despite this, it has still not been adopted on a wider scale. Even today, earth accounts for less than 1% of the building material used in Germany.

And yet the solution could be so simple: for the environment, as for so much else, the answer lies in “less is more”.

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The contributions submitted for the conference testify to the many ways in which building with earth is practised and being taken forward all over the globe, whether in local building projects around the world, in investigative research, or multilateral activities in training and education.

On behalf of the association, I would like to thank all the speakers and presenters for their contributions to the conference and poster session. I would also like to thank all those who have worked behind the scenes at the Dachverband Lehm e.V. to help prepare the conference. First and foremost, Stephan Jörchel, who for many years as the managing director has contributed with great energy to the success of many DVL activities. He put a lot of work into the preparation of the conference, continually adjusting the concept to meet the changing situation and accompanying requirements until the unfortunate cancellation.

That we are still able to present these conference proceedings is thanks not just to the speakers and Stephan Joerchel's coordination but also to Julian Reisenberger who, together with other translators, has helped communicate the knowledge and expertise of the presenters to the public. He also designed and laid out these conference proceedings.

We wish you stimulating reading in the pages of the conference proceedings and hope to see you in person in four years' time for the LEHM 2024.

Stay healthy!

Dr Constanze Küsel
Chairwoman of the Board
of the Dachverband Lehm e.V.