

Global warming: **we need to be free to act!** (30/11/2015)

by Martin Bouygues

The disruptions to the planet's climate have become very visible and bear out the message of all those who have been sounding the alarm and warning the human race for years. Unfortunately, these upheavals are very serious and have major consequences for the existence of millions of human beings and the geopolitical balance of entire regions. The choice therefore appears simple and stark: action needs to be taken now, while there is still time, in order to keep global warming within acceptable levels. In this respect, we sincerely hope that COP21's objectives of limiting global warming to 2°C by the year 2100 and launching strict action plans gain as much support as possible.

Under these circumstances, everyone involved has a duty to speed up the transition to a low-carbon economy. Energy efficiency, which aims to reduce consumption, is one of the main drivers that industry can use to fight against the effects of warming. This is a challenge that concerns the building industry first and foremost. Although the building and civil works sector has been, and alas still is, a major contributor in terms of CO₂ emissions, it is now also the first source of solutions. That is why we at Bouygues have structured a sustainable development policy over the last ten years and applied the highest standards in the field to our own buildings.

In order to go further and faster, in France and abroad, firms need clarity and visibility. Fighting climate disruption effectively means simpler and stable regulatory frameworks, which are essential to the investment decisions that have to be taken. It also means carrying out coherent policies across many different countries. Most companies are neither opposed to regulation, provided that those principles are respected by all, nor even to a carbon price high enough to encourage innovation.

Firms are aware of their responsibilities and the role they can play. But they have to be given the means to act, and everyone must understand that sustainable development should be seen as an opportunity and not a constraint if it is to really take root.

In the building and civil works industry, current and forthcoming new-build standards fulfil the energy efficiency objectives necessary to overcome the challenge of climate change. In most countries, these standards are tending towards harmonisation. In contrast, the sheer variety of existing buildings makes the situation for renovation more complex. And yet renovation is where most of the emphasis must fall in the years to come because the task is huge: 191 million buildings in Europe are very energy-intensive. But technological solutions exist which reduce the energy consumption of buildings once renovated.

We must be bold and reinvent our business models, our products and our organisations and remain constantly open to question, which is the only way to stimulate innovation. As industrialists, we are able to transform constraints into opportunities. We have shown that positive-energy buildings and eco-neighbourhoods are not a utopian fantasy, that urban renewal is possible without sacrificing residents' comfort, and that roads can produce energy and can be used for more than just getting from A to B.

What is possible for a large firm may also be possible on the scale of a city, a region, a country or even a continent. Together we will be able to meet these challenges, but if, and only if, we show both imagination and courage!

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