

From Romania to Spain With Green Building Expert Patricia Abrudan | Transcript

Introduction ([00:01](#)):

Welcome to Green Building Matters, the original and most popular podcast focused on the green building movement. Your host is Charlie Cichetti, one of the most credentialed experts in the green building industry, and one of the few to be honored as a LEED fellow. Each week Charlie welcomes a green building professional from around the globe to share their war stories, career advice, and unique insight into how sustainability is shaping the built environment. So, settle in, grab a fresh cup of coffee, and get ready to find out why green building matters.

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

Hi everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters podcast. I got to interview a green building professional somewhere in the world, and coming to us today from Barcelona, Spain. I've got Patricia, and she's just someone I met recently at the GBCIU Europe Circle Event and Barcelona. We just hit it off. I love all the great green building work she's doing in the region and just thought it'd be great to have her on the podcast. Welcome to the podcast How are you doing today?

Patricia ([01:05](#)):

Hello. Thank you for having me. Great, thank you. We have the summer dinner at work today, so it's a celebration.

Charlie ([01:13](#)):

It's gonna be a great day. For our podcast listeners they're gonna learn about how you got into green buildings and some great projects you've worked on and more. But take us back. Where did you grow up and where did you go to university?

Patricia ([01:29](#)):

I am from Romania in Eastern Europe. I am 41 years old, so I was born in the eighties. There was still communism there in those years. I went to architecture school in my hometown at the technical university there.

Basically, I managed to follow up on my career in my hometown because it was a university town. We had 70,000 students each year there, so it was pretty, pretty important. One of the most important towns in Romania, even today. It is mostly for music festivals and cultural events, but it's very cool.

Charlie ([02:20](#)): That's a big school. What drove you to think about architecture?

Patricia ([02:27](#)):

Actually, my mom was my first mentor, let's say. She saw in me a kind of talent for painting and matching colors, not as good as doing portraits, but with a technical mind and some good taste. She thought that I could be suited for architecture. In seventh grade, she told me, what if you could be an architect? It could be a really good job for you. Since then I thought that I could be an architect and in the 11th grade I discovered Gaudi the architect. I fell in love with Gaudi's work, and I got convinced that's my path. And even though today I'm not a creator, I'm a consultant. I'm still in the business and I'm grateful for that road,

Charlie ([03:29](#)):

And now you're right there in Barcelona with a lot of great Gaudi work around you. That's amazing.

Patricia ([03:35](#)): Actually I live next to a Park. Living that dream.

Charlie ([03:39](#)):

That must have helped you choose to come to Spain. What about sustainability and green buildings? When did that first start showing up for you?

Patricia ([03:50](#)):

I would say that because of our background, like growing up in a communist era, we saw that the neighborhoods were pretty similar matchboxes. And I've always felt like I needed to try to make a difference. I didn't know how, but when I got to architecture school, I was thinking that some urbanism projects could actually help me achieve that. In the end, it didn't work out like that because in life doing projects, public projects is

more difficult than, maybe private private enterprise. I felt that that need to try to improve the deliverability of our cities and try to make better spaces. So around college is when I started feeling that I needed to try to involve myself into the Sustainable City project. And then coming to Spain, I had one of our family friends who is a European studies professor at the university where my mom works. She told me that the European Union was doing a lot of projects towards circular circular buildings, but it was sustainable buildings, sustainable environment and that maybe I should focus on eco architecture, which is what I did. When I came to Spain, my current employer, I was doing an internship and here I was offered the chance to study and present myself for LEED the credit professional. I really embraced the chance because it felt like the perfect opportunity for me to get involved in improving the community and the sustainable buildings.

Charlie ([06:09](#)):

That's how you got on this path. I love it. Let's talk about your lecturing, because I know you love to teach about it too. But mentors, you mentioned your mom, that's amazing. Is there anyone else you kinda looked up to along the way or anyone else you might call a mentor?

Patricia ([06:26](#)):

Yes. In my early days working in an architecture office. I had an architect mentor, and she actually helped me put my ideas into practice and actually transform projects into reality. We had residential projects, they weren't something iconic, but she was really grounded and she really made me see the impact you could do with so little in people's lives. She was one of my mentors. And then actually all my bosses here in Spain, the managers I have, somehow managed to encourage me and help my career thrive, towards sustainability projects. Whether it was in facility management or project management or engineering. They all supported my willingness to try to go to the next level or try to go towards a more sustainable environment. And that made me thrive and made me have more experience in sustainability and get to talk with different types of clients and try to help

them achieve their goals and make the environment better, which are sometimes two contrary objectives?

Charlie ([08:10](#)):

Oh, those sound like some really great mentors. I think mentors are important. Not everybody gets to have mentors. Sounds like you've had some great mentors along the way. One more look back. What do you kind of proud of? What are some of your proudest achievements so far?

Patricia ([08:29](#)):

I would say that the most important on a personal level that actually intertwines with the professional is that I've actually managed to build a career in sustainable building consulting in Barcelona, which is my favorite city. This journey also allowed me to build a family here and a life and create this professional and personal life outside of my country, which is always difficult and still be in my field of work in buildings and go to the next level and try to make a difference in sustainability. So that's on a pro, on a personal level, that would be the achievement I am most proud of and on project levels we've had. I know we're going to talk about maybe some other projects, but we've had a client that has been with us. I've been working in hi Jota Heero since 2012. So mostly all my career in sustainability consulting was here in this company. Basically, we've had a client that started with us certifying their buildings with LEED and now they've certified all their portfolio. And I'm really proud of the fact of how they've grown, how we have learned to walk the path of sustainability together and how they embedded sustainability in their business model and in their construction projects because they're a real estate developer. I think they've worked for almost 10 years each year on projects, new projects, and they still have the same team. And everybody's now conscious of the importance of sustainable building and how they have to create. They started out, like everyone, trying to get a medal, but now they're actually conscious about it. I'm really proud about the fact that me and the Hotta team were a part of this development actually of their journey.

Charlie ([11:00](#)):

Sounds like that key client has really grown doing more. Thank you for sharing that. I know you do a lot of great work. Are there a couple projects though? It's hard to say. What's your favorite project? I'm not even saying that, but just one or two projects you can talk about that you've had fun working on in your career so far.

Patricia ([11:23](#)):

All the projects we do are exciting on the level that we have, we usually have complex projects. A lot of our work came from the engineering side of the business. So there were laboratory buildings or hotels and malls and residences all in one or corporate headquarters. They were buildings that weren't easy to handle from an NG project point of view. But on the other projects that were let's say less complex as an architecture design, they were also, it was also fun to do the client management, the account management. It's always a challenge to be able to be on the same page with the client, know their needs and try to promote sustainability while helping them achieve their goals.

Patricia ([12:38](#)):

That's always a challenge and that's actually the most fun for me in this endeavor. One of my, like one of the oldest, my first projects is, for example a commercial office building and LEED that got certified in 2014 for Colonial, one of the real estate developers in Spain. And that was a very real important milestone for me because it was the first time we men convinced one of our LEED clients to do a measurement verification plan for the electrical network. And that got them points, but it was something new for me because I am an architect, not an engineer. For me it was a really swift learning curve at that point. That was one of the first, then one of my longest projects and that had, it was really complex, was a hotel in Madrid can house that is four Seasons hotel with a mall with residencies and four level parking with with the area that was negotiated with a mayor's office to do an intermodal train station. It was a really complex project that lasted from 2012 until last year. It was almost a 10 year project and it was really interesting to be able to, to actually participate from the beginning until the

end of that project, because usually people don't stay in one place working so long for the same company. And there are colleagues in that project that made the same journey as me from the beginning to the end, others didn't, but kind of creates a bond with those people because it's a long lasting relationship.

Charlie ([14:50](#)):

10 years just doing some amazing work. You've worked on some really fun projects. Thank you for sharing. Let's talk about the present day. I know your role at your company, you've been there a while, have evolved, more responsibilities, even your current title, I think it says Decarbonization and ESG as well as consulting and projects. What's keeping you busy today?

Patricia ([15:14](#)):

Since last year we've decided to launch a new business unit called ESG and Decarbonization in order to be able to help our clients in real estate to tackle the ESG reporting context, and also to manage, to put in value our engineering side as part of that decarbonization process. Basically we have the unique opportunity to use our engineering infrastructure. We are a 170 people engineering firm with several offices in Spain and a few abroad. We've been around for more than 50 years. We have a tradition in engineering and basically what we've seen on the market is that there is a lot of ESG consultancy with a background in finance or business. And that's really good. At the strategic level, I think that that works.

Patricia ([16:25](#)):

When it comes back down to implementing these strategies, they need a more technical team. And this is where we come in, we can use our expertise in engineering to help our clients put those global strategies into practice and maybe like get down to earth at a building level, at a portfolio level and even improve the conditions of their, of their buildings, like let's say in health. And trying to touch all the social and the governance matters related more to the environmental side of ESG. Since it is all about climate change now, I think we have an edge in this side of the business and that's why we've started to grow this this business unit and help our clients either

go down from (inaudible) reporting to do like a top down approach from reporting to decarbonization of portfolio or buildings or to clients that started out with green building certification of wild building and, and go up from the bottom up to get to ESG reporting. And let's say comply with your taxonomy. We have mostly clients from Europe. So the taxonomy is one of the things that is on everyone lips these days. And it's actually for us, like a good, a good opportunity to consult on more projects and actually offer more green building certifications because as our studies have shown, they are very much aligned and buildings that are green building certified have most of the documentation that an E S G reporting non-financial scheme requires.

Charlie ([18:33](#)):

It's speeding everything up. You've got a great head start. That's a sizable company now. It's easier to have these conversations. There are some big mandates, big goals. I know that's a really great opportunity. It's a smart move to use ESG and decarbonization. Those are the two big umbrellas now essentially. I know you like to teach and you've been a lecturer in the past, so what are some topics you like to teach about?

Patricia ([19:03](#)):

I've been doing a course at, so after I came here in 2005, my ex manager from <inaudible>, we were, I was doing an internship in facility management. He, he encouraged me to do an actual postgraduate course in facility management. And the field was really interesting. So he and the other facility managers, like from Barcelona and Madrid managed to set up some, like a framework, a study framework for facility managers to be able to have a technical knowledge, not only on the field, but also like study-wise. He encouraged me to do one of these courses that was offered by the architecture order in Barcelona. I managed to do that course in 2012. In 2015, while I was already working as a sustainability consultant for a hotel, he was still running the postgraduate course and he offered to teach me a course on sustainability certifications for green building. Since it was right up my alley, I've been doing that course since 2015, and now they're at

90 edition. I'm really happy that I've managed to continue the course. At first it was poor time management, but I got a little bit better at synthesizing with time. And I also like to teach space management, space planning. I discovered while doing that postgraduate course and having that experience that I was really suited for facility management and it was a field that really interested me. Like everything that happens with the building after it's construction, how it's run, how it's operated, what are the regulations, how are we going to improve it, how are we going to maintain it? How are we going to provide the best conditions for the users of the building?

Patricia ([21:29](#)):

One of the managers offered me the possibility to do a course on space management and space planning. So that was also like being an architect that wasn't very difficult to set up. And I really liked it because it was a different way of thinking of things that seem pretty obvious. It's true when I did that, when you learn these types of subjects, you realize that there are a lot of things that are obvious, but you don't think of them until someone mentions them. It's really good to verbalize them to get examples because it's the way you learn how the world works and how you can actually influence your everyday life.

Charlie ([22:24](#)):

You're right. And that world influences ties to leadership. Some of the work you're doing is sustainability leadership, arguably. Thanks for hitting on the lecturing. I know you've taught and inspired a lot of others getting into this kind career. Let's talk about the future. I love to ask a green building professional like you what's next? What are you excited about? What's coming in the green building movement?

Patricia ([22:51](#)):

I don't know if I should be excited because it, the emergency of climate action. Basically, yes, it's implementing circular economy and swift switching the paradigm from a linear economy to circular economy in order to achieve decarbonization. It's a really big step forward and that's one of

the things I'm most, most excited about, but the motivation for doing it is something a little bit fatalistic. It's about actually realizing that there is an urgency to act and we have a certain deadline and we should be pretty consistent in measuring the, what we're doing in our results and trying to, to get it done. Because at some point, the earth will be unlivable. So it's exciting because it's a new opportunity for green buildings and for sustainability to be in the focus of everyone and get like this call to action from a lot of different backgrounds and sectors. But on the other hand, it's a little bit saddening because we've gotten to this emergency part and it's not just business, it's affecting our daily life.

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

I'm still optimistic. I know you are too, but it's that reality check. Those that have been doing this a while realize we're doing good work, but there's more to do and we need everybody to help. I hear you on that front. Let's get to know you a little bit better. What's your specialty or gift?

Patricia ([24:46](#)):

It's account management. Oddly, it is not a creative task. You would think that with the background in architecture and would be, it would be more of a towards the design characteristic. But It's a car management. It's working with people, with clients and ha and trying to embed sustainability in their operations, in their buildings, while helping them achieve their goals. I've said it a couple of times, but doing the win-win with the client is always the best strategy for them to come back to try to do more. In my experience, I've seen that it's always a longer term strategy to be able to meet halfway and try to help to get to a win-win situation and, and not be very rigid. Although I'm from a background that was actually pretty rigid. Even if we seem that way as sustainability consultants, you have to comply with this, you have to comply with that this is the rule. You have to get there. The creative side of helping your clients to get there is one of the most rewarding parts of the work. Basically that's what my specialty,

Charlie ([26:37](#)): I can tell your clients love working with you, so thank you for sharing and I'm sure that is your specialty. Do you have any good habits or routines

Patricia ([26:47](#)): I don't know if they're habits, but you can never give up.

Charlie ([26:59](#)): Resilience. Resilience.

Patricia ([27:01](#)):

Resilience is one of the best ways to actually succeed. Believing in yourself and thinking that everything needs work. You have to do the work. Even if you're talented, you have connections, you're smart and you are knowledgeable. You still need to do the work because there will always be someone with the same qualities as you who's willing to do the work.

Charlie ([27:29](#)):

Lots of wisdom there. Thank you for sharing. As we get to know each other more, I'm a big fan of a bucket list. Are there one or two things maybe you could share that might be on your bucket list? Sometimes it's travel exploring. Sometimes you wanna write a book. I don't know.

Patricia ([27:47](#)):

I've always loved to travel. Actually in my honeymoon we have got an our paddy license for diving. We went on our honeymoon and instead of honeymooning, we did a crash course on diving, and we got the license, and then we started diving, and then the kids came. We have in our bucket list to go to Belize and to the Great coral reef.

Charlie ([28:19](#)): The two biggest reefs in the world. I'm here in the southeastern United States. I really like Belize for taking my play there. Let me know when you're making that trip. I'll give you some tips. What a great country.

Patricia ([28:35](#)): I think that will be closer than Australia, but we have some family in Australia, so it might not be long until we get there.

Charlie ([28:54](#)):

It's on the bucket list. You have to do it. Is there a book you'd recommend or a documentary, a podcast, a TED talk? How you like to learn. It doesn't

have to be about buildings. Is there something you'd recommend to our list?

Patricia ([29:10](#)):

The last book I read was *The Brain of the Child*, so I don't know if that applies. It really helps with having not only newborns, but dealing with small kids and how they think and how you can approach them without being in a conflict all the time or being in a punishment reward kind of situation.

Charlie ([29:45](#)):

Parents or anyone that knows becoming a new parent, make sure you get 'em that book. I'll put a link. That's a great recommendation.

Patricia ([29:55](#)):

I think the Helen MacArthur Foundation, I would recommend to anyone their materials on circular economy are really spot on. I think they actually have some courses on that. They could be helpful in our business, actually, circular economy. I find them very inspiring.

Charlie ([30:25](#)):

What a great tip. I'll put a link to those resources. Arguably we don't talk about circular economy enough, so I'll put a link. As we start to wind down, I've really enjoyed our conversation today. You know, building on when I met you in April, and here we are talking about your career. As you look back on your career, is there anything you wish you didn't know earlier? Any career advice you wish someone would've told you earlier in your career?

Patricia ([30:52](#)):

I'm thinking. I don't know if it's advice, but as architects, we've been taught to be creators, and they've always had that ambition to try to be a creator. It's like being God-like in architecture, they have the view of the god architect, the creator of a world. I did my studies thinking that that is really cool design and creating things from nothing, and that will be my legacy. I still think that that is really noble and I don't know, like sustainable gold. It'll last for a long time, a durable goal. But along the way I realized that not

everybody needs to be a designer. I realized that I had felt more comfortable doing consulting and account management in the architectural field and in sustainability.

Patricia (32:01): My professional needs have been fulfilled by these kinds of tasks and with these missions. I would like to teach architects or students of architecture that from the beginning, that there are several exits from, or you call them in Spanish, but it's like several sectors where you can make a contribution as an architect. And it doesn't have to be just the side. I've met interior lighting designers, which did architecture school at first and then just specialized in lighting. I've met consultants, I met project managers, I've met facility management and managers, and they all pass through a process of this solution with the career because we cannot all be gadi. And then they managed to find their place in another architecture task related sector or career that requires their architecture expertise.

Patricia (33:18):

I would've liked someone to tell me that and not have to get these solutions entirely like with the architecture setting. They were sitting on that earlier I mean, with the boom in 2008, a lot of architects got that dissolution because at some point there wasn't, after the market crashed, the construction crashed. There wasn't enough work for so many architects. There was a kind of the dissolution for a while, and I think it would've been a good a good, a good lesson or a good advice for someone to tell there's a lot of ways you can be a good architect.

Charlie (34:09):

You're telling that to some other young professionals with great wisdom there. I love the words you used, just really the meaning of sustainability too. It's just got to last. Much good stuff there. Everybody listening, rewind this. 30 seconds, 60 seconds. Listen to it again. It was that good. As we come to a close here, let's say someone's jumping in right now to make a green building career. Any words of encouragement for them as we wrap up?

Patricia ([34:39](#)):The first requirement for you to start a green building career is to believe in the movement. And not to just sign up because it's fashionable. They should know, investigate a little bit what's behind it, and if they actually are in sync with this. And then they should try to formalize a little bit about education because it helps you discover where you can contribute.

Charlie ([35:11](#)):

Fantastic. Wow, I really got to know you more here. I hope everyone listening really enjoyed this. Make sure if you're listening, connect on LinkedIn here, and just can't wait to see you again. I know next year's Athens, Europe circle event. But I hope to definitely see you before then. Hey, keep up the great work. And I just wanna say thanks for being on the podcast

Patricia ([35:37](#)):You for having me, Charlie.

Speaker 4 ([35:41](#)):

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