

Heritage conservation and eco-restoration: a chance for one another

by *Frédérique Calvanus*

With the statement FUTURE PROOF HISTORIC CENTRES, the LINKS project aims to prove that historic centres can be the future eco-district. This statement means that the LINKS partners want to handle the conflicting usage of interest between preservation requirements and evolution needs. This ambition requires a comprehensive approach of the problem: social, urban, cultural and economic. That's why we all decided to tackle a wide and a transverse work programme to fit the needed integrated approach.

Our two first meetings were dedicated to urban and social challenges of the historic cities, and also to the essential involvement of citizens within the life of the city. These issues have provided the general framework for thinking about our historic centers. These questions are not closed for LINKS, and we will have to come back later on to make our concrete proposal to improve the urban management of historic cities..

We now arrive at the technical part of the programme, the most concrete and may be one of the most exciting issues to be addressed during LINKS.

For a long time, heritage conservation and energy saving have been considered as conflicting objectives. On one hand, the main concern for the stakeholders of heritage conservation was to plead for a status apart from European regulations to avoid the damage of standardization due to the regulation instigated to face climate change. Their attitude was almost defensive, and certainly justified face to the increasing thermal requirements. They were pointed the fact that thermal renovation works could have consequences and may jeopardize the authenticity, and the material integrity of this unique heritage.

On the other hand, local officials and town planners were aware that historic centres should evolve to meet the manifold demand of citizens today, and among these, the thermal comfort and energy efficiency of their dwellings. In their point of view, impossibility of evolution could also lead to a loss of cultural heritage and identity, loss of attractiveness and economic stagnancy.

Yet, the stakes in terms of quantity are significant. As a proof, here is the proportion of dwellings, considered as ancient (build before 1945) in Europe.

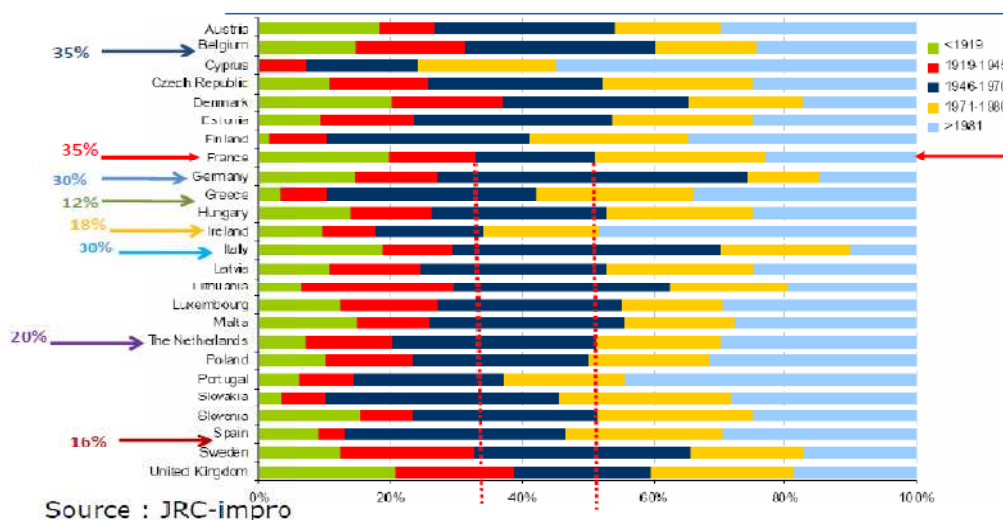


Figure 6: Age of buildings in the EU Countries: green is before 1919, red before 1945

The question we have introduced in the application form of LINKS in sept 2009 was: How can we manage the right balance between the preservation of built heritage and the sustainable, future proof development of historic towns ? This question was of a great interest for many historic cities all around Europe, that's why LINKS has been approved.

Since this approval, an abundant and recent literature pointed out how eco-restoration practices can be a chance for the conservation of ancient buildings, thanks, among others to their natural hygroscopic and breathability qualities.

From another point of view, the maintenance and reuse of the historic fabric, in particular of historic buildings contribute to the efficient handling of natural resources through:

- 1/ Reducing the need and consumption of new materials,
- 2/ Reducing land consumption
- 3/ securing the city of short ways (reducing the length of transport ways and causing less commuting)

In addition, recent studies have proved the fact that many historic buildings already show energy-saving qualities. This is not a surprise to some experts, but quite unexpected for many people and above all, it remains difficult to scientifically assess this.

What was still recently considered as conflicting values, conservation of heritage and environmental qualities, are now seen as two faces of a same medal and matches together to contribute to the sustainable future of historic centres.

What is the role of LINKS within this evaluative context? What can be our added value in this recent profusion of seminars, studies, publications about heritage and sustainable development?

- A considerable discrepancy between the real energy consumption of old buildings and the outcome from the computer simulations

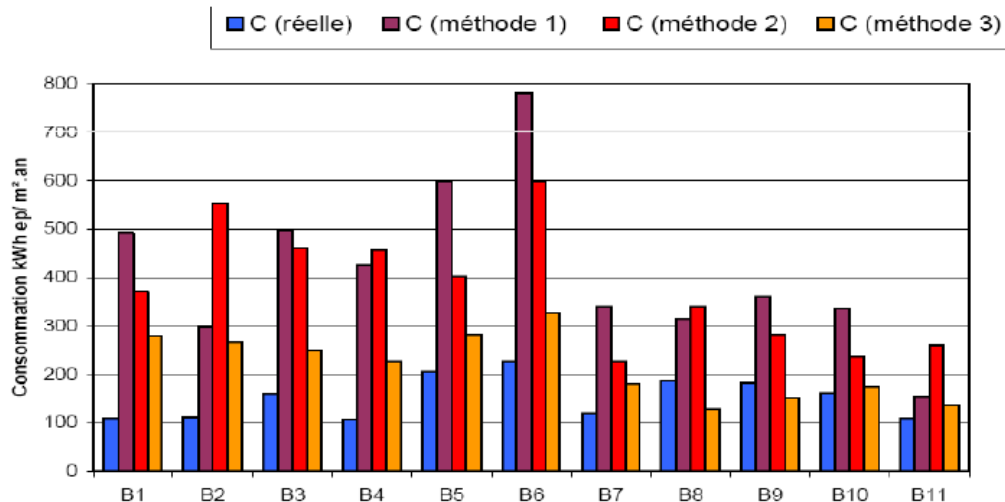


Figure 7. Comparison between simulated and real consumption of energy in old buildings.

First, we said it during the last meeting, LINKS is not a research project, but is a project based on exchanges of experience and practices. So, for us, the more knowledge progresses, the more we have material available. Nevertheless, some questions still pending, and knowledge remains incomplete. Some of us need to carry out additional expertise to improve the knowledge of their built heritage.

This meeting in Veria, dedicated to techniques, is the core of the project and will be the opportunity to remain the objectives of LINKS.

Our first challenge will be to gather knowledge, to showcase best practices within our network and to identify the best range of actions that can contribute to substantive energy savings and thermal comfort in historic buildings.

Qualities of the Low-tech and opportunities of high-tech will two lines of thought.

Our second challenge, may be the most difficult, will be to make this huge amount of knowledge available to the right people, at the right place and the right way, to develop concretely eco-restoration and to initiate a deep change in practices.

According to these 2 main challenges, we have tried to propose you a realistic and balanced programme for this meeting.

We initially thought that we could have the first day on the issue of "knowledge", the second one about the "transmission of knowledge" and the third one about the modalities of action within LINKS. But this first proposal was too loaded and may be too ambitious, so we decided to focus 2 plain days on knowledge, with only a quick glance on the assessment tools.

We will finally split the technical program, which is really the main target of our project, in the following meetings, to concentrate now on the questions of Knowledge. For that, we have the chance to meet and exchange with leading experts, and I wish we will have a studios and fruitful seminar.

**Veria's meeting : 24-25-26th May 2011 dedicated to the technical aspects of the eco-restoration
Heritage conservation and eco-restoration**

