Since the awareness on global warming and the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increasing the energy performance of buildings has been at the centre of many policy initiatives, strategies, plans, and legislations. To this end, the EU and its Member States have defined renovation strategies adapted to each country making it possible to achieve ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in buildings. Succeeding in operationalising these strategies and making them accessible and applicable to EU citizens remains an important challenge.

With the help of the EU, several Regions and Local Energy Agencies have developed various tools or services to make citizens aware of the need to act. Audit methodologies have been put in place to help citizens assess the energy performance of their building and to define possible improvements.

The EU, Member States and regions are also putting in place strategies to train the construction sector in the use of materials and technologies to achieve ambitious levels of energy performance in buildings.

Very quickly, the question of who is going to pay for the building upgrades came up front. EU financial tools (e.g. European Investment Bank) or national (subsidy, tax deduction, etc.) are now available to finance the audit and improvement of buildings.

Despite these initiatives, a citizen who wishes to improve his building still faces a lot of complexity and barriers. Faced with this observation, the solution offered by different regions and local energy agencies is the one-stop-shop.

Through a one-stop-shop, a citizen can obtain precise and quality information to prepare their project. They can also rely on the advice of professionals (financial, architect, auditor, etc.) to respect the legislation in force, to obtain financial aid, to carry out the plans of their project, to choose the materials for the most suitable insulation level. In some cases, they can take advantage of preferential conditions negotiated by the one-stop-shop with entrepreneurs, bankers, workers, architects, and auditors to implement their project.

Jean Van Pamel
FEDARENE Treasurer and Inspector General at Wallonia Region, Energy Department (BE)
In recent years, the multiplication of Integrated Home Renovation Services (IHRS) models focused on different types of services for homeowners. Which services are essential to accelerate the rate of building renovation?

In private housing, the decision to engage (or not) in a renovation mostly belongs to non-professional homeowners. Those usually don’t have the knowledge nor the time to manage a complex energy renovation project, which in any case is rarely their top priority. The type of relevant services to put in place depends largely on local conditions, but IHRS primarily seek to reduce the burden on homeowners by taking over the tasks and risks for which homeowners are not well equipped.

In particular, low energy renovation is too complex for most people. While market offer remains largely immature, investing large amounts of money in low energy renovation remains a risky project and many things can go wrong. The main goal of IHRS should be to reassure homeowners that low energy retrofits are feasible without going through a ‘renovation nightmare’. IHRS should not only create and strengthen links in a fragmented market offer, but also clarify liabilities, organise dispute resolution and impose corrective actions in case of poor workmanship. For instance, positioning IHRS in support to the homeowner, incurring professional liability for the advice provided, can help build trust. Quality assurance, consumer protection policies and independent third-party control should also be considered.

In addition, solutions to facilitate the financing of renovations are certainly helpful. Many avenues can be explored, from support in establishing a financing plan, optimising access to public grants, to pre-qualification for bank offers, or even standalone financing solutions. One key objective is for homeowners to access low-interest long-term debt to finance low energy renovation.

As the Commission is proposing revisions to EU’s energy efficiency legislation, the emergence and operations of IHRS will be influenced by new policy instruments. What opportunities and challenges do you see in this interaction?

There is a very broad political consensus today on the importance of massive renovation of existing housing, not only to achieve our climate targets but also to stimulate our economies during the sanitary crisis. The European Green Deal and the Recovery and Resilience Facilities clearly target home renovation, whether through grants or financial instruments. The proposed continuation of energy efficiency obligations may also bring additional financing for home renovation, depending on national policies. In addition, notably resulting from the EU taxonomy, banks are eager to finance more energy performant homes, which means newly built but also, increasingly, renovated homes.

However, for the increase in financial flows and public incentives to effectively result in a massification of low energy renovations, local support schemes must be in place, based on a subsidiarity approach. By design, IHRS aim to play an intermediary role, to ensure that public subsidies are absorbed and properly allocated to low-energy renovations. IHRS can also provide sufficient visibility and create the conditions for a growing number of qualified professionals, able to implement low energy renovations - failing which, increased ambitions may result in higher prices, longer waiting times, and disappointed homeowners.

What should, in your view, be the role of local/regional authorities and energy agencies in the emergence of IHRS in the next years?

When setting up an IHRS, strategic decisions must be taken to define the ambition, target and operational approach. Public authorities have a central role to play in these decisions and energy agencies are key assets in this process.

We have distinguished three main models for IHRS, depending on the services proposed to homeowners: an ‘advice’ model, focused mainly on information and first level advice; a ‘support’ model, fully engaged in market activities in support to homeowners; and an ‘implementation’ model, not only providing detailed...
advice but also carrying out all or part of the renovation work. While the first model is often implemented directly by public authorities or energy agencies, the other two are more likely implemented through specific entities (with various legal statutes). In that case, public authorities and energy agencies still play an important role in the design of the overall scheme, potentially improving it over time.

In any case, developing IHRS represents an important evolution from a technical expertise to a commercial and market-based approach. This was at the centre of the ManagEnergy Master Classes that were organised over the past 4 years, and additional capacity building initiatives should be organised in the coming years.

One-Stop-Shop in Île-de-France

The Île-de-France region is one of the most densely populated regions in Europe. This territory has 12 million inhabitants, nearly three quarters of whom live in collective housing, mainly in condominiums. A large proportion of this building stock is old, built in the 1950s to 1980s with poor energy performance. The renovation of this stock is therefore essential to reduce energy poverty and the territory’s carbon footprint.

With residential energy accounting for 23% of Ireland’s total energy consumption, housing and its sustainability is imperative for Ireland to transition to a low carbon economy. 3cea have up to 10 years’ experience in coordinating energy upgrades, ensuring a quality focus for homeowners. 3cea have helped complete energy upgrades on more than 2,500 homes as well as 500 deep retrofits since 2012. As project coordinators, 3cea can manage the entire process for the homeowner – from their initial application right through to completion of the project.

In 2018, the average dwelling consumed a total of 18,208 kWh of energy; 75% of this was from direct fuels which is often a fossil fuel-based heating source such as oil, gas, peat, coal, and the remainder electricity. In 2018, the average dwelling emitted 5.1 tonnes of energy-related CO2, down from 8 tonnes in 2005, but there’s more scope for improvement.

The three local authorities of Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny have a housing stock of 8,962 homes. Estimates of bringing all homes up to B2 standard is in the region of €134 million. Estimates of reaching the regional targets of 37,000 homes up to B2 is in the region of €11 billion.

Most people living in old, cold houses want to live in cosier homes but don’t know where to start. As a trusted One Stop Shop, 3cea provide homeowners with a bespoke upgrade plan so they can achieve a warmer and more comfortable home.

Eddie, a County Wexford homeowner, upgraded his home with 3cea in 2019 and shares his experience of undergoing an energy upgrade of his own. Eddie’s home transformation gives an insight into how to achieve such a major home improvement: 3cea.ie/eddies-home

3cea are a non-profit, independent energy agency from Ireland, working primarily in Counties Carlow, Kilkenny, Waterford, and Wexford. 3cea have a voluntary Board of Directors drawn from the private, public and community sectors. The agency envisions the Southeast region of Ireland as a leader in sustainable and efficient use of locally produced clean energy, delivering low carbon homes, jobs, and enterprise. 3cea play a strategic role regionally, partnering with its members and supporting all stakeholders on their energy transition journey to 2030 and beyond.

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3cea: +3000 HOME ENERGY UPGRADES SINCE 2012
Your energy agency, city or region faces some challenges in its energy and climate data collection, monitoring, processing or communication? Join the Energee Watch programme.

FEDARENE offers a peer to peer learning programme in which member energy agencies tutor their peers: energy agencies, regions, cities,... in 4 topics:

1. Energy Data collection (acquisition and treatment) mentored by the Energy Agency of Savinjska, Šaleska and Koroška Region (KSSENA) in Slovenia.

2. Monitoring, Reporting, Verification: follow up on implementation of actions mentored by the Cyprus Energy Agency.

3. Indicators and strategies on adaptation to Climate Change mentored by the Ile de France Regional Energy and Climate Agency, France.

4. Data display, dissemination and validation by end users mentored by the Auvergne-Rhône-Alps Energy Environment Regional Agency, France.

The peer learning programme is carried out in English, free of charge, and entails online exchanges, a Masterclass in Brussels and a study visit at the mentor agency.

The next learning cycle will start early 2022 and the programme is now accepting applications.

Get involved: energee-watch.eu/get-involved

QualDeEPC: Improved energy performance certificates to support deep renovation of buildings

Integrated home renovation services are a go-to when it comes to renovating a house, flat or multi-family building. The experts in these services have the knowledge to support owners in their renovation journey. As one of the tools necessary to help homeowners in renovating their houses, the energy performance certificates (EPC) of buildings have gained attention as a means to accelerate the renovation of the buildings and improve their energy efficiency.

QualDeEPC aims to enhance the quality and similarities of (EPC) schemes in the EU, and the link between EPCs and deep renovation. The project will also work on a Deep Renovation Network Platform where the key recommendations for building renovation developed thought the project will be coherent with deep energy renovation towards a nearly zero energy building stock by 2050.

For more information, visit the website: qualdeepc.eu

OpenGELA: Home integrated renovation one-stop-shop for vulnerable districts

Since 2019, the Basque Government is leading a EU-funded project aiming at establishing pilot One-Stop-Shops (OSS) for building renovation and urban regeneration in neighbourhoods where more vulnerable population lives. OpenGELA has 2 district offices running in Otxarkoaga (Bilbao) and Txonta (Eibar). Citizens receive information and advice from professionals working in their neighbourhoods on how to renovate their building, on topics such as energy efficiency, accessibility (e.g. elevators), technical aspects of the renovation work, access to funding, etc. The uniqueness of OpenGELA lies in its closeness to citizens - providing a non-institutional space where neighbours feel that they are heard - and its integral approach considering not just individual buildings but the whole neighbourhood.

Despite some difficulties during the COVID-19 crisis, the offices remained open, supporting homeowners in their renovation journey. This proved to be essential to ensure continued trust from citizens. The progress made in urban regeneration thanks to the increasing number of renovated buildings only adds to the people’s support in the project.

The success of the two offices inspired already others to create their OSS based on the OpenGELA model: about 9 neighbourhoods in municipalities of the Basque Country decided to take a closer look at OpenGELA to implement it in their territories. And it does not stop there: the OpenGELA model is also set to get replicated in other municipalities and regions in Europe. A call for “follower cities” has recently been issued, building on the lessons learnt from similar experiences in a series of (face-to-face and virtual) site visits to other European OSS (in Ireland, France, Italy and Austria) undertaken in 2019 and 2020, gathering first-hand testimonies on how to support citizens in improving their homes.

More information: opengelaeus/en
Contact: otxaropengelaeusvmm.bilbao.eus & txontabulegoaeibar.eus

OpenGELA
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