

A Comparative Analysis of Simplified Calculation Procedures for Assessing the Energy Losses of Heating Emission Systems

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Table of Contents

Preface	ix
Analytical Model (SAM 2.0): A New Frontier in Open-Source Building Energy Simulation <i>Michał Dengusiak, Jakub Ziolkowski, Michalina Dengusiak</i>	1
Synthetic Indices for Comfort Assessment: An Application to a Historical Building in Catania / Andrea Longhitano, Gianpiero Evola, Vincenzo Costanzo, Francesco Nocera	9
Data-Driven Digital Twinning of Ventilation Systems for Performance Optimization: A University Building Case Study <i>Andres Sebastian Cespedes Cubides, Jakob Bjørnskov, Muhyiddine Jradi</i>	17
Computational Cost Reduction of a Simulation-Based Optimization Process Through Machine Learning Methods: Neural Networks vs. Random Forest <i>Iuri Praça Verginio, Rafael de Paula Garcia, Mario Alves da Silva, Joyce Correia Carlo</i>	25
Normalization Method of Building's Actual Energy Consumption for Normalized Building Energy Benchmarking <i>Deuk-Woo Kim, Dong-Hyuk Yi, Cheol-Soo Park</i>	31
Simulator for Predicting Vertical Illuminance of Window With External Venetian Blind <i>Seon-Young Heo, Young-sub Kim, Seon-Jung Ra, Cheol-Soo Park</i>	39
Modelling Solar Disability Glare Reflected off Modern Building Facades <i>Matthew J. Glanville, Pallava R. Kodali, Mohammed Alsailani, Roberto P.M. Neto</i>	49
Energy Modelling and Calibration of a Controlled Environment Agriculture Space in a Cold Climate Using Building Performance Simulation Tools <i>Gilbert Larochelle Martin, Danielle Monfet</i>	57
Microclimate Conditions in the SS. Salvatore Church of Bologna <i>Haruna Saito, Massimiliano Manfren, Kristian Fabbri, Maria Cristina Tommasino, Lamberto Tronchin</i>	65
The Impact of Thermal Zone Resolution on the Energy Simulation Results of Complex Buildings <i>Christiane Berger, Ardeshir Mahdavi</i>	71
Development and Calibration of an Urban Building Energy Model for the City of Padua <i>Jacopo Vivian, Enrico Pratavia, Gianmarco Bano, Angelo Zarrella</i>	77
ClustEnergy OpTool: An Open Tool for Assessing the Energy Flexibility Provided by Clusters of Buildings <i>Patricia Ercoli, Alice Mugnini, Fabio Polonara, Alessia Arteconi</i>	85
The Role of Dynamic Primary Energy Factors (PEFs) in Building Performance Assessment: A Case Study <i>Matteo Bilardo, Riccardo Oldini, Enrico Fabrizio</i>	95
Modeling a Dew Point Indirect Evaporative Cooling System for TRNSYS Building Simulations: Proposal and Validation <i>Alessandra Urso, Gianpiero Evola, Francesco Nocera, Vincenzo Costanzo, Ana Tejero-Gonzales, Eloy Velasco-Gomez</i>	105
Acoustic Correction of the Regional Theatre of Bejaia (Algeria) <i>Feriel Saidane, Gino Iannace</i>	113
From Theatre to Cinema to Theatre Again: The Acoustic History of the Vittorio Emanuele II Theatre of Benevento Through Simulations <i>Gino Iannace, Antonella Bevilacqua, Umberto Berardi</i>	119
Economic and Environmental Optimization of Retrofitting Options for a Community Building. A Case Study from Förslöv-Grevie Parish, Sweden <i>Azadeh Hana Hassanzadeh, Sepideh Rabie, Marko Ljubas, Henrik Davidsson, Dennis Johansson</i>	125
Installation of Reflecting Panels in the Main Church of Aversa <i>Silvana Sukaj, Amelia Trematerra, Ilaria Lombardi, Giovanni Amadasi, Luigi Guerriero</i>	133

Building Information Modeling (BIM) and Building Energy Modeling (BEM): Interoperability and Interactive Data Representation for the Energy Management of the Existing Buildings <i>Ilaria Giannetti, Cristian Tolù, Giulia Scimia, Gianluigi Bovesecchi, Pier Paolo Valentini, Cristina Cornaro</i>	141
Modelling of Aquifer Thermal Energy Storage Connected to Hospital Buildings: A Case Study in Denmark <i>Mohammed Burhanuddin Rabani, Alessandro Maccarini, Michael Wetter, Alireza Afshari</i>	149
Analysis of Energy Consumption Scenarios of the Italian Residential Building Stock <i>Enrico Prativiera, Jacopo Vivian, Francesca Gaudino, Angelo Zarrella</i>	157
Automating Solar Shading Control in Residential Buildings Located in a Temperate Climate: A Household-Specific Decision <i>Lotte Van Thillo, Stijn Verbeke, Amaryllis Audenaert</i>	165
Simulating the Microclimate of a Pilot Greenhouse for the EU Project REGACE on Innovative Agri-Voltaic Technology <i>Cristina Cornaro, Marcello Petitta, Gianluigi Bovesecchi, Paolo Miraglia Fagiano, Catalin Voinea, Walter Fornari, Catherine Baxevanou, Dimitrios Fidaros, Chryssoula Papaioannou, Nikolaos Katsoulas</i>	175
Building Archetypes Supporting the National Building Renovation Plan <i>Matteo Piro, Ilaria Ballarini, Vincenzo Corrado</i>	183
Integration of Machine Learning-Based CIE Standard Skies Model With Daylight Simulation for Building Energy Performance Analysis <i>Emmanuel Imuetinyan Aghimien, Ernest Kin-wai Tsang, Danny Hin-wa Li, Zhenyu Wan</i>	191
A Design Assistant Tool for Optimised Building Energy Retrofit <i>Ilaria Di Blasio, Julius Emig, Dietmar Siegele, Dominik T. Matt</i>	199
A Simulation Study on the Performance of Machine Learning Daylight-Linked Lighting Control Under Urban Topography <i>Ernest Kin-wai Tsang, Emmanuel Imuetinyan Aghimien, Danny Hin-wa Li, Zhenyu Wang</i>	207
BIM2FEM: From Building Information Modelling to Finite Element Analysis – An Automated Open Source-Based Workflow <i>Julius Emig, Dietmar Siegele, Dominik T. Matt</i>	215
Hygrothermal Analysis of Most Common Historical Slabs in Hungary <i>Fanni Petreševics, Balázs Nagy</i>	223
Energy Flexibility Study of a Hotel Using TRNSYS <i>Michele Libralato, Giovanni Cortella, Paola D'Agaro</i>	233
The Impact of Classroom Acoustics on Student Well-Being and Noise Disturbance at the University of Pescara, Italy <i>Samantha Di Loreto, Alessandro Ricciutelli, Leonardo Guglielmi, Sergio Montelpare</i>	241
Environmental Quality Analysis in School Environment by Measurements and Numerical Methods <i>Leonardo Guglielmi, Samantha Di Loreto, Matteo Falone, Mariano Pierantozzi</i>	249
A Comparative Analysis of Simplified Calculation Procedures for Assessing the Energy Losses of Heating Emission Systems <i>Franz Bianco Mauthe Degerfeld, Ilaria Ballarini, Vincenzo Corrado</i>	257
Simplified and Fully Detailed Dynamic Building Energy Simulation Tools Compared to Monitored Data for a Single-Family NZEB House <i>Ana Paola Rocca Vera, Giovanni Cortella, Paola D'Agaro</i>	265
A Building Renovation Concept Based on a Low-Temperature Geothermal Loop With Decentralized Plug-And-Play Heat Pumps <i>Sara Bordignon, Jacopo Vivian, Agnese Tagliaferri, Davide Quaggiotto, Michele De Carli</i>	273
The Urban-Scaled EnergyPlus Simulation Using Korean GIS to Aid Development of Energy Normalization for Shading Effect <i>Dong-Hyuk Yi, Deuk-Woo Kim</i>	281
Thermal Comfort and Environmental Impact in the Heating System Refurbishment of a Victorian Hall With Infrared Ceiling Panels <i>Roberto Rugani, Marco Picco, Fabio Fantozzi</i>	289
Personal Comfort Systems (PCSs) in Offices: Efficient Utilization Threshold Based on Energy Consumption <i>Roberto Rugani, Marco Picco, Giacomo Salvadori, Fabio Fantozzi</i>	297

Integration of Rooftop Photovoltaics and Roof Retrofitting Strategies for Enhanced Energy Efficiency in Warm Climates <i>Krithika Panicker, Prashant Anand, Abraham George, Ardeshir Mahdavi</i>	305
Effects of an Indoor Living Wall on Room Lighting Conditions: Comparison Between Measured and Simulated Data <i>Matteo Ghellere, Alice Bellazzi, Anna Devitofrancesco, Benedetta Barozzi</i>	317
Mold Growth Affecting the Achievement of NZEB in the Long Term in Tropical Climates <i>Cristina Carpino, Miguel Chen Austin, Cihan Turhan, Dafni Mora, Natale Arcuri</i>	325
Mitigating Summer Overheating of a Primary School Building Based on Dynamic Simulations <i>Ágnes Marosi, Balázs Nagy</i>	333
Analysis of Energy Consumption of a Building Placed in Milan by Adopting Common Building Insulation Materials and Recycled Surgical Masks <i>Vincenzo Ballerini, Paolo Valdiserri, Manuela Neri, Jan Kašpar, Mariagrazia Pilotelli, Edoardo Piana, Eugenia Rossi di Schio</i>	343
Recommendations to Make Reinforcement Learning Practical in Building Control Applications <i>Sourav Dey, Gregor Henze</i>	353
Simulation-based optimization for Energy- and Cost-Efficient Refurbishment of an Educational Building <i>Levente Szatmári, Balázs Nagy</i>	361
Achieving a Deeper Understanding of User-Related Influences on Artificial Lighting Energy Demand Using High-Performance Computing <i>Sascha Hammes, Johannes Weninger, Philipp Gschwandtner, Philipp Zech</i>	371
Strategic Synergy: Enhancing Building Performance Through Advanced Simulation and Shading Integration <i>Shahryar Habibi, Giovanni Pernigotto, Andrea Gasparella</i>	379
Is Solar Hydrogen a Viable Solution for Energetically Self-Sustainable Off-Grid Buildings? <i>Stefania Perrella, Roberto Bruno, Piero Bevilacqua, Daniela Cirone</i>	389
Assessment of the Simultaneity Factor Between PV Production and Electric Demand in a Real Scholar Canteen Belonging to a REC Through TRNSYS Simulations <i>Daniela Cirone, Roberto Bruno, Piero Bevilacqua, Stefania Perrella, Natale Arcuri</i>	397
Exploitation of Energy Performance Certificate Database in Urban Energy Modelling <i>Sebastiano Anselmo, Maria Ferrara, Piero Boccardo, Stefano Paolo Corgnati</i>	407
TRNSYS Dynamic Simulation Model of a Typical Air-Handling Unit: Experimental Calibration and Validation Based on Field Operation Data in the South of Italy <i>Antonio Rosato, Rita Mercuri, Mohammad El Youssef, Francesco Romanucci, Mohamed G. Ghorab</i>	415
Examining the Influence of Climatological Parameters on Building Cluster Geometry and Design Features in a Rural Indian Context: The Case of Sugganahalli Village (India) <i>Jeswin Varghese, Andrea Magdalene Pais, Suchi Priyadarshani, Monto Mani</i>	425
Estimating Indoor TVOCs in Response to Varying Humidity Regimes in Vernacular and Conventional Dwellings <i>Shreyata Khurana, Monto Mani</i>	435
Examining Indoor Humidity Ratio in Response to Varying Window-To-Wall Ratio and Ventilation in Indian Climate Zones for Earth-Plaster Based Dwellings <i>Suchi Priyadarshani, Monto Mani</i>	445
Calibrated BEMs and LSTM Neural Networks for Indoor Temperature Prediction: A Comparative Analysis in Pre- and Post-Retrofit Scenarios <i>Gianluca Maracchini, Nicola Callegaro, Rossano Albatì</i>	453
Impact of Different Radiation Decomposition Models and ERA5 Dataset on Building Energy Simulation Results: A Case Study in Brazil <i>Matheus K. Bracht, Matheus S. Geraldi, Ana Paula Melo, Roberto Lamberts</i>	461
Effects of Different Wind Speed Databases on the Performance of a Vertical Axis Micro Wind Turbine Integrated With a Typical Residential House: A Comparative Simulation Analysis for Five Italian Cities / <i>Antonio Rosato, Achille Perrotta, Luigi Maffei</i>	469
The Challenge of Archetypes Representativity for Wide Scale Building Investigation in Italy <i>Laura Carnieletto, Lorenzo Teso, Wilmer Pasut, Angelo Zarrella</i>	479

Comparison between Real Energy Consumption, Italian APE and Dynamic Energy Simulation <i>Vincenzo Pennisi, Davide Varesano</i>	487
Simulation Tests for the Determination of the U-Value of Walls by Using Response Factors Theory with Noisy Boundary Conditions <i>Maja Danovska, Davide Cassol, Ivan Giongo, Alessandro Prada</i>	495
Calibrating a Clothing Insulation Model for Thermal Comfort Assessment in Educational Buildings <i>Ilaria Pittana, Federica Morandi, Andrea Gasparella, Athanasios Tzempelikos, Francesca Cappelletti</i>	503
Alternative Affordable Solutions in Reducing the Number of Hours with Heat Strain Inside Buildings <i>Atlas Ramezani, Marco Manzan</i>	511
An Attempt to Model Ventilation Rate in Classrooms Based on the Measurement of Relative Humidity <i>Federica Morandi, Alessandro Prada, Ilaria Pittana, Francesca Cappelletti, Andrea Gasparella</i>	519
Assessment and Mapping of the Urban Heat Island Effect: A Preliminary Analysis on the Impact on Urban Morphology for the City of Turin, Italy <i>Gregorio Borelli, Ilaria Ballarini, Vincenzo Corrado, Andrea Gasparella, Giovanni Pernigotto</i>	525
Analysis of Control Strategies for Energy Performance Optimization for Educational Buildings: Comparison of Two Kindergartens in the Municipality of Bolzano, Italy <i>Angelica El Hokayem, Giovanni Pernigotto, Andrea Gasparella</i>	533
Optimization of a Solar Assisted Heat Pump System to Increase Thermal Efficiency Working on the Cold Source <i>Piero Bevilacqua, Stefania Perrella, Roberto Bruno, Daniela Cirone, Dimitrios Kaliakatos</i>	541
Simulative Applications of Novel Indicators for the Characterization and Performance Evaluation of Transparent Facades <i>Riccardo Gazzin, Giuseppe De Michele, Stefano Avesani, Giovanni Pernigotto, Andrea Gasparella</i>	549
Predicting Daylight Preferences Using HDRI and Deep Learning <i>Dongjun Mah, Athanasios Tzempelikos</i>	557
An Investigation Into Thermal Bridging Effects in an Envelope Integrated With End-Of-Life Photovoltaic Panels <i>Roshan R. Rao, Monto Mani</i>	565
Modelling Actions at the Building Stock Level for Decision-Making Towards Carbon-Neutral Cities <i>Erminia Consiglio, Luca Ferraris, Mirella Iacono, Gaetano Noé, Maria Ferrara</i>	573
A New Evaluation Framework to Assess the Prosumer Efficiency in Thermal Source District Heating Networks <i>Alireza Etemad, James O'Donnell, Alessandro Maccarini, Alireza Afshari</i>	583
The Influence of Acoustic Stressors in Educational Environments for Autistic Individuals: Preliminary Investigations <i>Marco Caniato, Federica Bettarello, Arianna Marzi, Andrea Gasparella</i>	593
Machine Learning and Data Augmentation Techniques to Cope With Solar Data Scarcity to Simulate PV Generation in Mountain Environments <i>Aleksandr Gevorgian, Giovanni Pernigotto, Andrea Gasparella</i>	601
Building Performance Simulation From Research to Professional Practice <i>Lori McElroy, Andrea Gasparella</i>	609

A Comparative Analysis of Simplified Calculation Procedures for Assessing the Energy Losses of Heating Emission Systems

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Abstract

In the assessment of energy performance of buildings, the efficiency of technical building systems, especially those related to heating and cooling services, has a significant impact on the overall energy consumption. For this reason, accurately determining the performance of these systems is of utmost relevance.

Current simplified procedures for evaluating technical building systems lack complete validation, potentially leading to undesired inaccuracies in the results.

This paper analyses the existing simplified procedures provided by standards for assessing heat emission and control subsystems. It examines the procedure currently in use in Europe and presents a comparative analysis with more detailed procedures. Through a case study approach, the research explores several configurations of a representative residential space, considering factors such as climatic data, envelope properties, emission terminals, and control strategies. By addressing these aspects, this research contributes to enhancing the understanding of the effectiveness and reliability of simplified procedures for assessing the performance of technical building systems.

1. Introduction

One of the key factors influencing building energy performance is the efficiency of the heat emission system. For this reason, precise calculation methods to assess emission losses are required, taking into account their connection with control systems, building thermal inertia, user behaviour, and other boundary conditions. However, complexities in modelling these interconnected systems limit the widespread use of highly accurate procedures. Hence, there is a need for approaches that balance

simplicity and accuracy in assessment methods.

Following the publication of Mandate M/480 EN (European Commission, 2010), efforts were made to enhance the building energy performance assessment by updating the procedures to evaluate the efficiency of the heating and cooling systems. Nevertheless, emission terminals and control subsystems still require systematic revision. Standards like EN 15316-2 (CEN, 2017) and ISO 52031 (ISO, 2020), currently lack comprehensive validation. The application of these procedures is also insufficiently flexible, since they often rely on tabulated values, overlooking the actual emission terminal performance. Other existing calculation methods oversimplify the complexities involved in modelling the emission heat losses, often neglecting some physical phenomena related to the performance of these systems (e.g., non-uniform temperature distribution indoors).

Emission losses usually account for spatial temperature variations and component overheating. Stratification arises from different air temperatures across a space, influenced by heat exchanges between air and surrounding objects. Overheating results from excessive heat exchange from internal or external sources, notably affecting long-wave heat transfer. Factors influencing these losses are related to technical building system components and the building itself.

Comprehensive studies on enhancing simplified procedures for evaluating the thermal energy loss of emission and control systems are lacking in more recent research work. Initial efforts by Maivel et al. (2014) were put into the assessment of the hydronic emission system efficiency, revealing significant differences compared to detailed calculation methods, especially in low-temperature sys-

tems. Maivel et al. (2015) also validated standard procedures for radiators and floor heating systems, emphasizing the interconnectedness of building, emission, and control systems on efficiency. Further studies by Maivel et al. (2018) explored the influence of stratification on emission efficiency, confirming methodological differences and highlighting the role of control strategies. Seifert et al. (2016) examined simplified procedures for radiators and control valves, assessing efficiency and accuracy through empirical analyses. Vösa et al. (2020) addressed the lack of standardized procedures, proposing an alternative method for analysing parameters in the EN 15316-2 (CEN, 2017) procedure.

1.1 Aim of the Research

This research aims to address existing knowledge gaps through the analysis of simplified calculation procedures for heat emitter losses, with the perspective of complete validation. While previous works, such as Bianco Mauthe Degerfeld et al. (2024), have analysed the effect of different heat emission terminals, this work focuses more on the influence of various control strategies.

The study involves a comparative analysis of energy losses in heating emitters under different control strategies, using simplified methods. A case study approach was employed, analysing a typical residential building in different configurations. Various Italian climates and envelope insulation levels were considered. Two types of emission terminals were analysed: radiators and low-temperature radiant systems. The effect of different control strategies (i.e., on/off and proportional) was also assessed to study the relevance of the control system in determining heat losses.

The simplified procedures analysed were implemented and simulated in EnergyPlus. The results were compared and evaluated based on the thermal output of the emission system, normalised over the heated floor area. Additionally, the influence of the calculation time-step was considered by performing simulations with both hourly and sub-hourly time-steps, to assess the relevance of more refined calculation intervals in evaluating the energy losses of the heating emission terminals.

Statistical indicators were used to compare the results and present yearly aggregated outputs.

2. Methods

In the following sections, the simplified and detailed procedures deployed in this work are presented. The control strategies coupled with the emission systems are described as well.

2.1 Standard Procedure

The analysed simplified procedure is outlined in EN 15316-2 (CEN, 2017) and ISO 52031 (ISO, 2020). The methodology determines the energy loss due to the heat emission and control subsystems by modifying the indoor temperature. The set-point temperature is increased or decreased (in the case of cooling systems), depending on an analysis of the system properties. The consequent variation in heat exchange is considered equal to the heat loss of the analysed subsystems. This procedure is mainly performed through a qualitative assessment of the system properties. If detailed measured system information is available, this step can be performed with a higher level of detail. However, such data are often unavailable, so a tabular approach can be applied. Equations 1 to 3 present the procedure to determine the temperature variation.

$$\Delta\theta_{\text{int,inc}} = \Delta\theta_{\text{hydr}} + \Delta\theta_{\text{emt,syst}} + \Delta\theta_{\text{ctr,syst}} \quad (1)$$

$$\Delta\theta_{\text{emt,syst}} = \Delta\theta_{\text{str}} + \Delta\theta_{\text{emb}} + \Delta\theta_{\text{rad}} + \Delta\theta_{\text{im,emt}} \quad (2)$$

$$\Delta\theta_{\text{ctr,syst}} = \Delta\theta_{\text{ctr}} + \Delta\theta_{\text{im,ctr}} + \Delta\theta_{\text{roomout}} \quad (3)$$

In Equations 1 to 3, $\Delta\theta_{\text{int,inc}}$ is the equivalent internal temperature difference while all the other terms represent temperature variations. Specifically, $\Delta\theta_{\text{emt,syst}}$ for the emission system, $\Delta\theta_{\text{str}}$ for the air stratification, $\Delta\theta_{\text{emb}}$ for embedded emitters, $\Delta\theta_{\text{rad}}$ for the type of emission system, $\Delta\theta_{\text{im}}$ for intermittent operation, $\Delta\theta_{\text{ctr,syst}}$ for the control system, $\Delta\theta_{\text{ctr}}$ for the control variation, $\Delta\theta_{\text{roomout}}$ for the space automation of the system, and $\Delta\theta_{\text{hydr}}$ for the hydraulic system balancing.

2.2 Detailed Procedure

Two detailed procedures for energy performance assessment were analysed: one for radiators and another for low-temperature radiant systems. These procedures are commonly integrated into detailed dynamic building energy assessment tools like EnergyPlus.

The first procedure, designed for radiators and convectors, accounts for both the convective and radiative heat transfer. The convective part and the radiative fraction on people and internal items with very low thermal capacity directly affect the air temperature, while the radiative fraction on the building components increases their surface temperature. Although this procedure accurately models the heat transfer between the room and the radiator, it neglects the effects on air stratification and emitter inertia.

The second procedure, designed for low-temperature radiant systems, evaluates the position of the piping within the building component through which the heat transfer fluid flows. The static and dynamic properties of the fluid and piping are assessed to define the temperature inside the component for the energy balance. Consequently, thermal inertia is properly considered in the performance assessment.

2.3 Control Strategies

In this work, two control strategies were implemented to analyse their influence on different calculation procedures: on/off control and proportional control.

The on/off control, also known as two-position control, operates in two states: fully open or fully closed. Typically, a deadband is employed. The system switches position when the lower or higher limit of the deadband is crossed. However, due to the system inertia, the latency in response may cause the measured parameter to exceed the deadband limits, causing overshoot and undershoot effects, respectively.

The proportional strategy involves a control deadband applied to a measurable variable. Depending on the measurement, an actuator modulates the control variable through a linear correlation., allowing

for more precise control compared to the on/off strategy.

In control strategies applied to heat emission systems, the control variable is usually the flow rate of the heat transfer fluid. For hydronic systems, such as radiators, it involves water flow rate, while air flow rate is the control variable in air systems, such as VAVs.

3. Application

3.1 Case Study Description

The case study was based on the representative European room outlined in Annex C of ISO 52031 (ISO, 2020). This room is a residential space with a net floor area of 20 m² and a net volume of 54 m³. Three walls, the floor, and the ceiling are adjacent to internal spaces, and the heat exchange through these components is neglected. The south-oriented wall, adjacent to the external environment, contains two windows with a total area of 3 m². The opaque enclosure consists of brick walls with plaster finishing, and concrete slabs with parquetry. The envelope's main thermal properties are detailed in section 3.2.

The profiles of internal gains, shown in Fig. 1, are defined according to EN 16798-1:2019 (CEN, 2019).

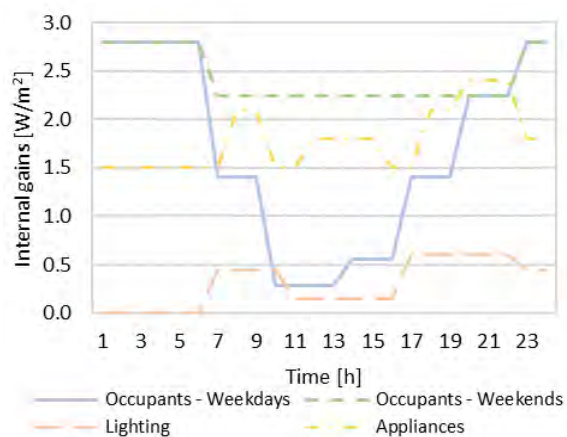


Fig. 1 – Profile of the internal gains by source type, normalised over the net floor area

Natural ventilation, with an air change rate of 1.4 h⁻¹, is considered according to the method based on the perceived air quality for residential spaces (CEN, 2019).

The building includes lighting, domestic hot water, and heating systems. For the purposes of this work, only the heating system is analysed in detail. It comprises a gas-condensing boiler for generation, well-insulated pipes for distribution, and either a radiator or a low-temperature radiant floor for emission. The building is assumed to be heated continuously during winter, with an operative temperature set-point of 20 °C.

3.2 Modelling Options

Different options were analysed and compared. As presented in Table 1, five aspects were considered: the calculation procedure, the climatic zone, the period of construction, the emission system, and the control strategy.

Table 1 – Calculation variants and codes

Aspect	Variant	Code
Calculation procedure	Standard	S
	Detailed	E
Climatic zone	Milan	M1
	Palermo	M2
Construction period	Old	I1
	New	I2
Heat emission terminal	Radiator	R
	Radiant floor	L
Control strategy	On/Off	C1
	Proportional	C2

The variants are detailed as follows:

- Calculation procedures: As described in sections 2.1 and 2.2;
- Climatic zones: Typical meteorological years (TMY) were deployed. Two cities, Milan (2404 HDD) and Palermo (751 HDD) were considered;
- Construction periods: The building labelled as “Old” was derived directly from standard values (ISO, 2020). The properties of the building

labelled as “New” were determined from the “Old” building by increasing, if necessary, the thermal performance of the envelope components. The deployed values are presented in Table 2. The maximum thermal transmittance value (labelled as “max”) was derived from the current Italian regulations (Italian Republic, 2015);

- Heat emission terminals: As described in sections 2.1 and 2.2;
- Control strategies: On/Off and proportional were considered. For both, a deadband of 1 °C was deployed (± 0.5 °C from the temperature set-point).

Table 2 – Envelope properties

Component	Code	U (W m ⁻² K ⁻¹)
External wall	M1_I1	0.91
	M1_max	0.26
	M1_I2	0.26
	M2_I1	0.91
	M2_max	0.43
	M2_I2	0.43
Window	M1_I1	2.24
	M1_max	1.40
	M1_I2	1.40
	M2_I1	2.24
	M2_max	3.00
	M2_I2	2.24

Some consistency options were applied to the simulations. In particular, for the simplified procedure, only the terms that refer to the type of emission system, the embedded component, and the control variation were analysed, while the others (i.e., the air stratification, the intermittent operation, the space automation, and the hydraulic balancing) were neglected.

3.3 Comparison Procedure

The results of the different procedures were analysed in terms of the input thermal energy to the emission system normalised over the net floor area. The 32 simulations are presented in pairs, differing only in the calculation procedure, while the climatic data, construction period, the type of heat emission terminal, and the control strategy are fixed. The 16 pairs are then analysed using two statistical indices, i.e., the mean bias error (*MBE*) and the coefficient of variation of the root mean square error

(*cvRMSE*). The detailed procedure is used as the reference set of data to normalise the *MBE* and the *cvRMSE*.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the procedures outlined earlier. Fig. 2 to 4 display the monthly actual energy needs absolute differences from the simplified and detailed methods for radiator and radiant floor heating in Milan and Palermo.

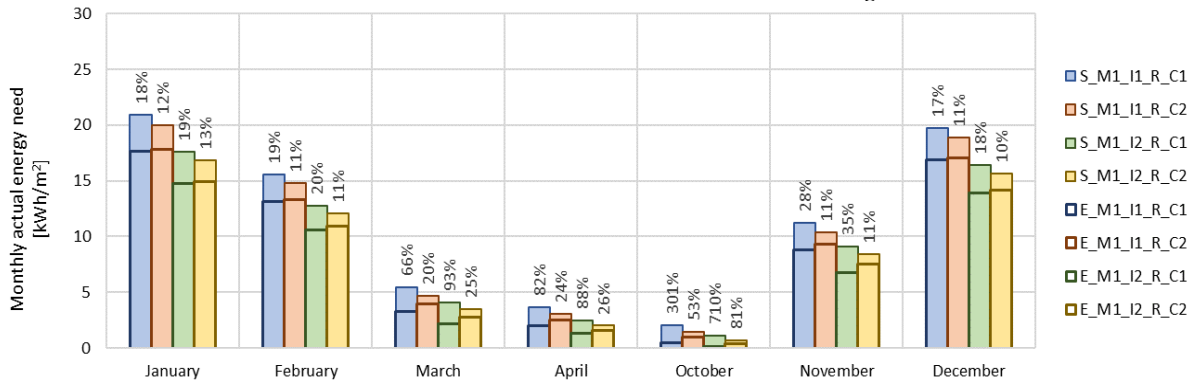


Fig. 2 – Monthly actual energy needs normalised over the net floor area for the radiator in the city of Milan

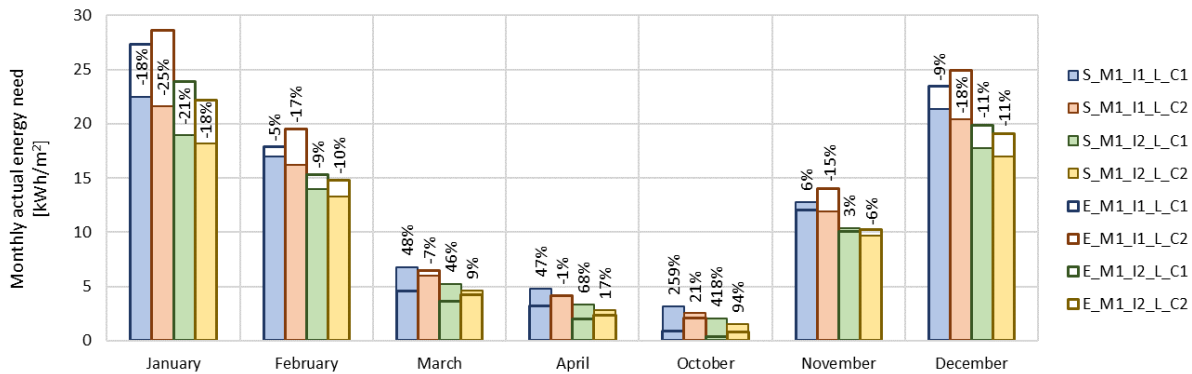


Fig. 3 – Monthly actual energy needs normalised over the net floor area for the radiant floor in the city of Milan

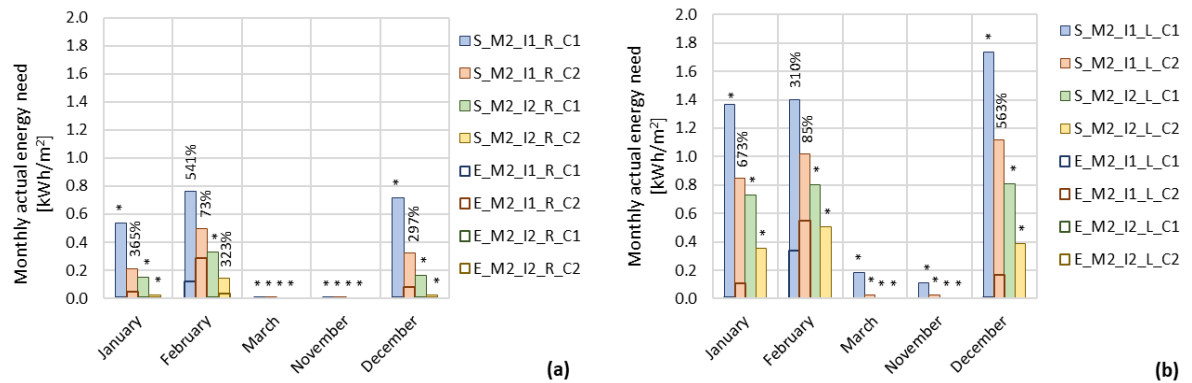


Fig. 4 – Monthly actual energy needs normalised over the net floor area for the radiator (a) and the radiant floor (b) in the city of Palermo, (“***” in case of monthly results close to zero)

The months without heating energy need were excluded from the graphical representation.

For each month and variant, a label with the difference between the simplified and detailed method results normalised over the detailed method result is presented. In the case one or both monthly results are close to or equal to zero, a “*” is indicated on the label.

An initial analysis of the results of the 16 simulations pairs reveals significant differences between the two methods.

The results for the city of Milan highlight similarities in the trends when the radiator is deployed as the emission terminal, as shown in Fig. 2. On the other hand, the results of the simulations carried out deploying the radiant floor heating system present higher differences, as illustrated in Fig. 3. This may be caused by the inefficacy of the standard procedure in reproducing the energy need fluctuations due to the system inertia.

The results for the city of Palermo, presented in Fig. 4, exhibit a significant variation in the results. The detailed procedure presents in almost all the cases an actual energy need equal to or close to zero. For this reason, the percentage variation of the differences from the detailed procedure results presents values over 300 % in almost every month. This is mainly caused by the differences in the two procedures.

The detailed procedures assess the system efficiency changes, a task that can only be performed in time-steps where the space presents an energy need for heating (or cooling). In contrast, the standard procedure, by increasing the set-point temperature of the building, generates two effects. Firstly, it increases the actual energy needs to assess the effect of the emission and control subsystems, as intended. Secondly, it generates energy needs for time-steps where the energy need should be zero.

While this effect may impact the results when energy needs are not null for most time-steps in an insignificant way, it can significantly affect low-energy buildings.

The analysis of the calculated statistical indicators, presented in Table 3 further highlights the difference between the two analysed cities and the two emission terminals presented before.

The results also show that the *cvRMSE* is lower when the proportional control is applied compared to the cases where the on/off control is used.

This is probably related to the fact that the proportional control gives a more stable output to the emission system, reducing the fluctuations and the errors.

Table 3 – Statistical indicators

Case	MBE [%]	cvRMSE [%]
M1_I1_R_C1	26	36
M1_I1_R_C2	13	16
M1_I1_L_C1	-1	233
M1_I1_L_C2	-17	42
M1_I2_R_C1	29	43
M1_I2_R_C2	13	17
M1_I2_L_C1	-4	151
M1_I2_L_C2	-9	23
M2_I1_R_C1	1596	1124
M2_I1_R_C2	150	400
M2_I1_L_C1	1306	566
M2_I1_L_C2	267	443
M2_I2_R_C1	-	-
M2_I2_R_C2	452	820
M2_I2_L_C1	-	-
M2_I2_L_C2	-	-

5. Conclusion

In this paper, a comparison between different procedures to assess the energy losses of the emission and control subsystems was carried out.

Both simplified and detailed procedures were analysed and implemented in a dynamic simulation tool, EnergyPlus, to standardise the calculation procedure enabling the comparison.

A case study approach was adopted, varying climatic data, envelope properties, emission terminals, and heat control strategies within a representative residential space.

The results revealed notable differences between the procedures. In particular, the simplified procedure yielded higher input energy to the emission terminal for radiators, and lower energy consumption for floor heating systems when considering yearly results.

Moreover, the analysis of control systems showed significant monthly differences in energy consumption. Proportional control showed better coherence between the results of the analysed procedures compared to the on/off control.

The results underscored the unreliability of the simplified method in assessing energy consumption for buildings with low energy needs, particularly evident in warm climates. However, this limitation is not limited to warm climates, as there is an increasing number of zero energy buildings across all climates. Mandated by current European Directives, will be impacted.

Future studies will explore phenomena such as air stratification, not addressed in this study, to further enhance understanding of overall building energy performance.

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Nomenclature

Symbols

$cvRMSE$	coefficient of variation of the root mean square error (%)
MBE	mean bias error (%)
U	thermal transmittance ($W\ m^{-2}\ K^{-1}$)
θ	temperature ($^{\circ}C$)

Subscripts/Superscripts

ctr	control
emb	embedded
emt	emitter
hydr	hydraulic balancing
im	intermittent
inc	increased
int	initial
rad	radiant
roomout	room automation
str	stratification
syst	system

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