

Exploitation of Energy Performance Certificate Database in Urban Energy Modelling

Original

Exploitation of Energy Performance Certificate Database in Urban Energy Modelling / Anselmo, S., Ferrara, M., Boccardo, P., Corgnati, S.P.. - ELETTRONICO. - (2025), pp. 407-414. (Building Simulation Applications BSA 2024 Bolzano (I) 26-28 Giugno 2024).

Availability:

This version is available at: 11583/3000404 since: 2025-05-26T07:29:09Z

Publisher:

Bu Press

Published

DOI:

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Konferenzbeiträge / Atti / Proceedings

Building Simulation Applications BSA 2024

6th IBPSA-Italy Conference
Bozen-Bolzano, 26th–28th June 2024

Edited by

**Giovanni Pernigotto, Ilaria Ballarini, Francesco Patuzzi,
Alessandro Prada, Vincenzo Corrado, Andrea Gasparella**

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Bozen-Bolzano University Press, 2025

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Cover design: DOC.bz / bu,press

ISSN 2531-6702

ISBN 978-88-6046-202-2

DOI 10.13124/9788860462022



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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 Prativiera, 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 Pratavera, 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 Petresevics, 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 Albatoci</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

Exploitation of Energy Performance Certificate Database in Urban Energy Modelling

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Abstract

Cities are crucial for the energy transition, as recognized by the European Union in policies such as the Fit for 55 package and the Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities mission. The former calls for the revision of several directives, among which the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) plays a major role, targeting the phasing out of fossil fuels and the achievement of minimum performance objectives for all existing buildings. It reinforced the role of the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) as a shared evaluation schema. However, considering the 30-50% coverage of EPCs in the European building stock, new methodologies and models are required to assess the building stock extensively. Considering the valuable data contained in EPCs, these can be used to train Urban Building Energy Models which leverage the potential of Earth Observation. This study proposes a new method to segment the building stock according to thermographic pictures, resorting to EPC information for the energy class distribution analysis. Thermographic values are used to assess thermal losses and replicate the energy class distribution accordingly. Different EPC data are assessed in order to understand the best configuration both in terms of share between training and validation data and of the need for potential pre-filtering. The method appears to be reliable – with 66% of buildings classified correctly on average – yet simple, thus being attractive for policymakers to define retrofitting campaigns able to meet European requirements. With simplicity and flexibility being the main strengths of the method, it is also possible to consider additional inputs and make the model more complex to improve the accuracy.

1. Introduction

The energy transition challenge is to be addressed at first in cities, which have the potential to effectively cut two-thirds of their energy-related emissions (IEA, 2016). Moreover, initiatives such as the EU Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities mission (European Commission, 2023) – providing funding to local administrations for the implementation of measures for climate neutrality – fostered the debate on the most effective ways to reduce impacts and mitigate the effects of climate change.

The energy performance of the building stock, together with the possibility to cover the total demand as much as possible from Renewable Energy Sources, has been considered in international policies, issued by the European bodies, thus favouring an increase in the yearly deep renovation rate of the building sector from the current 0.2% up to the target of 3%.

The Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) recast (Council of the European Union, 2023b) – framed into the Fit for 55 package (Council of the European Union, 2023a), which aims to align the EU with its decarbonisation goals – set a minimum performance objective in the upgrade of all buildings falling into the energy performance class G and defined a path for the complete decarbonisation of the building stock. Both processes are based on the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) – required before renting or selling and after deep renovation processes – in which an auditor compares the real performance to the ones of a reference building and provides a comprehensive evaluation. The relevance of energy performance is pointed out

also by the recast of the Energy Efficiency Directive (European Parliament and Council, 2023), which introduced the “energy efficiency first” principle, requiring all policies – both energy-centred and not – to consider their implications on this topic.

In this framework it is necessary to elaborate tools able to support energy policy by assessing the building stock on a wide scale, starting from the identification of the worst-performing buildings. Indeed, EPCs cover only a small portion of the building stock e.g., in Italy 10% (Pagliaro et al., 2021), making it necessary to model the remaining share through energy models and algorithms (Johari et al., 2020). Still, EPCs can be used to gather the inputs to define archetypes in Urban Building Energy Models, which consider both geometrical and energy-related parameters to estimate energy consumptions, thus going beyond the problem of unbundled data gathering – costly in terms of time and money (Deng et al., 2023). Data homogenisation – referring the information to entire buildings – can be performed through Geographic Information Systems (GISs), powerful tools in energy modelling thanks to the possibility to consider different layers and spatial resolutions (Yu et al., 2021).

This paper – starting from the potential to use EPCs in training datasets for Urban Energy Models recognised in existing studies (Conticelli et al., 2024; Johari et al., 2023) – aims to leverage infrared thermography to estimate energy consumptions of the *Barriera di Milano* neighbourhood in Turin, Italy. A review by Martin et al. (2022) has highlighted the potential of thermography in quantifying thermal losses, one of the principal indicators for energy classification. Therefore, from the assessment of the surface temperature difference between buildings – considering a constant internal temperature as set by law – it is possible to classify buildings according to their thermal signature.

2. Simulation

This research aims to improve a previously established method for buildings’ energy classification based on the combination of EPCs and infrared thermography (Anselmo et al., 2023). The process – whose workflow is pictured in Fig 1 – can be

divided into two main components: 1) data gathering and pre-processing of both inputs – the EPC dataset and the thermographic picture; 2) attribution of a class itself. This second step, in which the class distribution observed in the EPCs is replicated based on thermal losses, is better detailed in Section 2.3.1. A sample of the EPCs is not used for the training, being kept for validation.

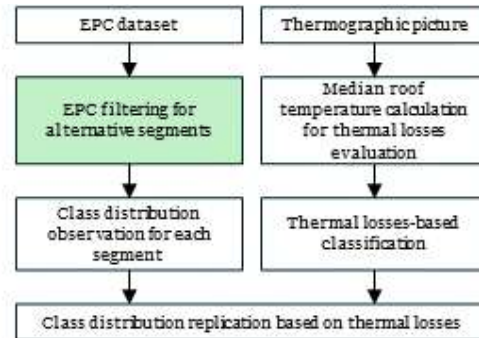


Fig. 1 – Workflow of the proposed methodology

While a first element to consider for the refinement of the drafted methodology is the segmentation of the building stock, this paper focuses on the optimal selection of training data from the EPCs database, highlighted in green in Fig. 1. It is believed that by guaranteeing the trustworthiness of the training dataset, final results can be highly improved.

2.1 Data Preparation

EPCs are gathered from the open portal of the Piedmont Region (Osservatorio ITC della Regione Piemonte, 2024) divided by section and filtered based on cadastral sheets in order to keep only those on the Area of Interest (AoI). Based on the available information, selection and aggregation criteria are defined, considering whether the same parameter is repeated in different sections – and therefore in different tables. All data – processed through DB Browser for SQLite – are merged first according to a univocal ID to return a single entry for each EPC and then by considering the address to have one value for each volumetric unit, the minimum unit of geospatial data derived from the Municipal Technical Map.

Also thermal values derived from Infrared Thermography are referred to volumetric units. The QGIS zonal statistics tool was run to obtain the

median temperature value – chosen instead of the average to mitigate the relevance of extreme values – from a thermal orthophoto produced with pictures acquired through a FLIR A8581 MWIR HD camera.

2.2 Correlation Analysis

In order to understand the most critical indicators to be considered when estimating the energy performance from EPCs, it is necessary to first look for correlations between the energy class and specific characteristics of the buildings.

According to Conticelli et al. (2024), the period of construction is the principal information among building parameters, because it mirrors the evolution of the technical and normative standards in the building industry. Therefore, this analysis started from the year of construction. It was also decided to consider the year of the last renovation in order to check whether refurbishments correspond to significant increases in energy performance by making the building compliant with legislation.

Finally, the potential correlation with the Surface-to-Volume (SV) ratio is explored, so as to understand whether there is a building typology whose consumptions are generally lower.

2.3 Energy Classification

2.3.1 Class attribution

This thermography-based methodology applies the class distribution observed in the EPCs dataset to the volumetric units based on roof temperature values. By assuming a constant internal temperature – defined by law to be 20 °C for residential buildings – the temperature of the envelope returns the thermal losses. Therefore, by ordering volumetric units according to the temperature value, it can be assumed that the order goes from the least to the most performing building.

The class distribution can be observed for the whole EPC database or filtering the entries according to specific fields. Therefore, different samples are extracted. First, the use of the building will be considered: as the premises are based on residential buildings, it can be assumed that the selection of residential buildings only would refine the results. The other two elements to base the selection on are the motivation for the EPC issue and the scale of the

analysis. EPCs are released both before selling or renting a building or building unit and after a deep renovation; it can be assumed that the EPCs released after refurbishing are more reliable, based on technical sheets of newly-installed technology – as the thermal transmittance of fixtures – while the obsolescence of existing systems in units to be rented or sold may cause data gaps. As for the scale of analysis, it is relevant to note that this method uses the volumetric unit as the minimum unit of analysis. What needs to be explored is the difference between considering a single EPC issued for the whole building or multiple EPCs for single building units.

In all cases, how the classification changes when increasing the share of buildings used for training, keeping the remaining for validation will be assessed. In particular, combinations of 20% for training and 80% for validation, 50/50% and 80/20% will be considered. As a result, a total of 15 simulations will be carried out:

- Three without EPC filtering.
- Three based on EPCs covering whole buildings only.
- Three extracting only the EPCs issued for residential units or buildings.
- Three for EPCs issued after deep renovations.
- Three for EPCs issued before renting or selling the unit.

2.3.2 Validation

As previously mentioned, pre-defined shares of EPCs will be used when training the estimation model, keeping the remaining for validation, carried out by comparing correct and incorrect class attributions. True positives and false positives will be considered to compute the Receiver Operating Curve (ROC), which plots on the X axis the share of misallocations and on the Y axis the share of correct classifications. In this research, all volumetric units classified within a ± 1 deviation from the exact class are considered as True Positives. Variations based on alternative filters and sampling on the full EPC dataset are assessed.

3. Discussion and Result Analysis

3.1 Data Preparation

The four tables concerning the four EPC sections required to gather the necessary information were processed through SQL code in DB Browser for SQLite and aggregated according to the address in order to return one value for each civic number, to be attached to volumetric units. As a result, 346 out of 688 volumetric units in the AoI (50%) were characterized with EPC data.

On the other hand, the median roof temperature – crucial to define the performance of the building envelope – was computed for each volumetric unit, with values ranging from $-1.09\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ to $15.94\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$.

3.2 Correlation Analysis

The first analysis considered the potential correlations between specific information considered into EPCs, starting with the year of construction. However, a clarification is needed: out of 346 buildings for which the correlation is assessed, 266 (77.1%) are in the two least performing classes; it is not surprising to observe a widespread presence of these two classes in all the observed categories.

Although there is not a direct relationship between the year of construction and the energy performance class, in Fig. 2 it can be observed that the most recent buildings are included in the most performing classes, thus remarking the relevance of recent energy policies, especially from 1990s. A similar trend could be observed also on the opposite side of the graph: with the exception of class D, it can be noticed that by increasing the energy class, the oldest building of every class has been realised progressively later. On the other hand, it is not possible to observe any correlation between the year of the last renovation – reported in 79 cases (23%) – and the energy performance. Therefore, by looking at the wide presence of buildings refurbished after 2010 in classes F and G, it can be assumed that most renovations are not related to energy performance.

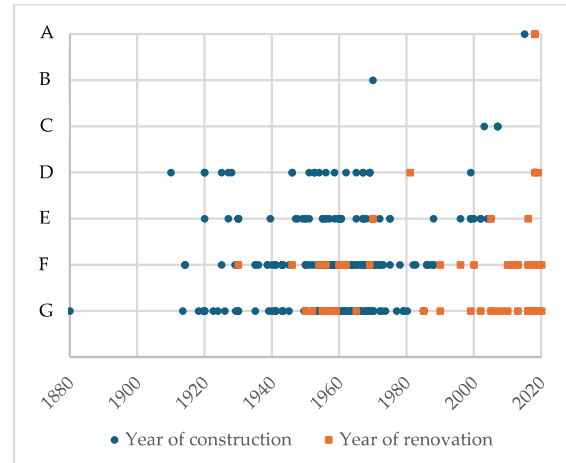


Fig. 2 – Correlation between year of construction and year of renovation and the energy performance class

A similar reasoning can derive from the observation of the relationship between the energy classification and the SV ratio, with a homogeneous distribution of the values. It is only possible to mention a slight tendency towards a worsening of the class when increasing the SV ratio – standing for less compact building typologies.

3.3 Energy Classification

3.3.1 Class distribution observation

Together with the roof temperature, the class distribution which can be observed in the EPC dataset is the crucial input. In this study, this component is varied by filtering the EPCs according to five criteria and further subdividing with different shares between the training and validation sets. From this, it results that different class distributions are observable in the AoI, plotted in Fig. 3.

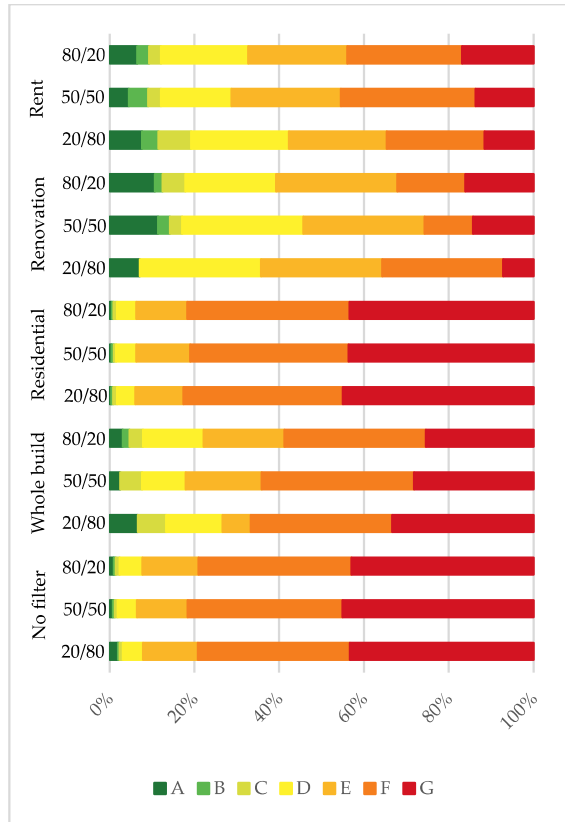


Fig. 3 – Class distribution according to different filtering

The prevalence of the two least performing classes – mentioned above – can be widely observed, with most classifications including more than 50% of the values in these two. This is valid especially when no filter is applied and for residential buildings, since more than 90% of buildings belong to classes E to G. On the other hand, it can be observed that by considering only renovated buildings there is a wider incidence of the higher classes – especially A – despite the lack of correlation observed in Section 3.2. A final element to be highlighted is the scarce presence of class B buildings: in the full database, only seven volumetric units – approximately half of the ones falling in classes A and C – are included in this class.

3.3.2 Class attribution

The class attribution is based on the roof temperature; thus all classifications are comparable in terms of the area where least performing buildings are located. This is the Western part, around Respighi Square, generally characterised by a prevalence of class G buildings. On the contrary, it can be observed that there are homogeneous urban portions,

in particular in the Eastern part – around Cravero Street – where there is a stronger incidence of classes D and E. Due to the low share of buildings included in the higher classes, it is not possible to observe a clear concentration of volumetric units in classes from A to C – unless by observing the classification according to EPCs following a renovation, where there is a cluster of 11 buildings in the two most performing classes.

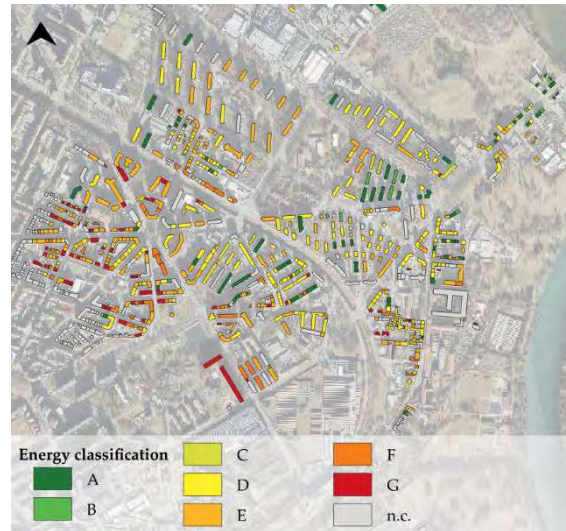


Fig. 4 – Energy classification based on EPCs after renovation

Moving to a comparison between the different filtering categories, it is strongly related to the observations on the distribution of the different classes. The highest performances can be observed by segmenting the building stock according to renovation EPCs – shown in Fig. 4 –, while the opposite results from the residential EPCs – plotted in Fig. 5. Nevertheless, the latter is comparable with the full dataset, with no filtering applied: most buildings are residential, so this segment significantly influences the trends of the entire district. Also EPCs deriving from renting or selling and the dataset considering whole buildings show similar values, despite the former having a slight tendency to higher classes.

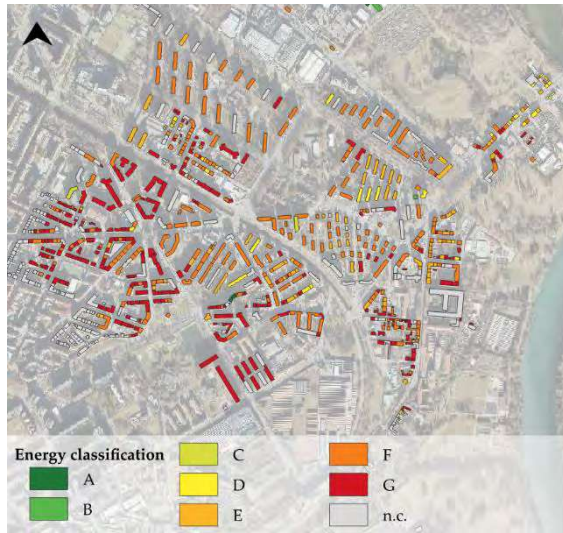


Fig. 5 – Energy classification based on EPCs of residential buildings

When considering the EPCs covering the whole building, it can be observed that in two cases – out of the three training/validation combinations – a small homogenous area located between Cravero and Ancina Streets and Taranto Avenue has buildings falling in the same class, D; in the remaining case, three buildings are classified as A. This is particularly relevant for the draft of energy policies: it can be foreseen that the whole portion is to be renovated simultaneously, taking advantage of the homogeneity of the district – which simplifies the preliminary phases.

3.3.3 Validation

The different classifications were validated against subsets of the EPC database – as described previously – in order to check the class differences, both positive and negative.

There is a general tendency towards overestimating the energy class, especially when testing the results of the estimation based on residential EPCs. However, there are no areas in which a high number of buildings are misclassified. As for the characteristics of the misclassified buildings, there is not a direct correlation between errors and the period of construction, while most differences are observed for buildings with an SV ratio lower than 0.4 – 70% in the 20/80 combination of residential EPCs classification.

For plotting the ROC – Fig. 6, which compares true and false positives, all classifications within a ± 1

class difference were considered as correct (true positives). Results are satisfactory, with most classifications proving to be above the chance level – indicating the results given by a random classification (with True Positives probability equal to 50%) –, thus making the validation results trustworthy. The only classification which proved to be wrong in every configuration is the one carried out according to the EPCs issued after renting or selling, confirming the assumptions stated in the introduction about a lower reliability deriving from problems in gathering the necessary data. Further problems can be observed when considering the 20%/80% configuration of the EPCs issued for residential buildings and the 80%/20% configuration of the renovation dataset; the renovation dataset in the 20/80% configuration corresponds to the chance level. Problems in classifying according to EPCs issued after renovation show a lack of correlation observed in Section 3.2.

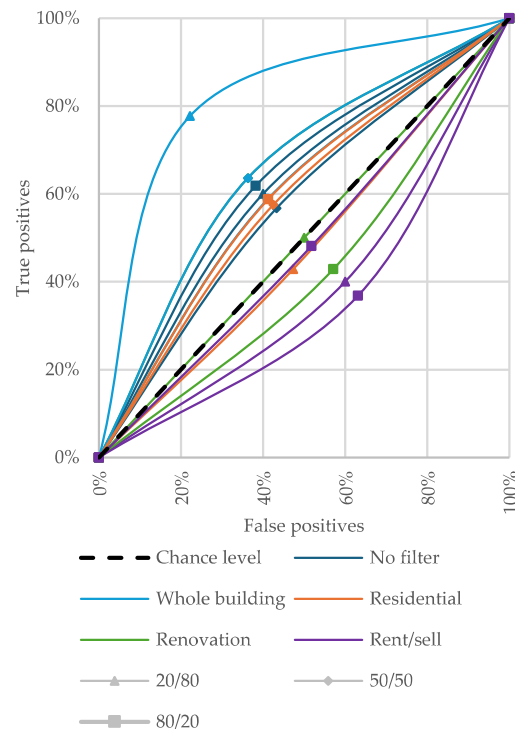


Fig. 6 – Receiver Operating Curves

Synthetic observations can be observed by looking at the 40 and 60 percentile and the median value of all the curves. For true positives, these correspond – respectively – to 53%, 59% and 57%, making the general results satisfactory. The best results are

observable for classifications based on the EPCs issued for whole buildings – which do not require any data aggregation –, further confirming the initial assumptions. However, this result is downsized considering the lower number of volumetric units used for validation, 12 on average in the three combinations.

4. Conclusion

This study refined a methodology presented in a previous publication (Anselmo et al., 2023) which combines aerial thermography and data mining from Energy Performance Certificates for energy performance classification. EPCs were used to both train and validate the model, with different filters and combinations, allowing the identification of worst performing buildings.

The results proved the efficiency of the method and the incremental nature of the resulting energy performance evaluation accuracy, with an accuracy which reached 80% in some cases. Once having gathered the necessary inputs – mainly EPCs and temperature values – the methodology can be fully automated, not requiring any human resource to perform the classification: this could be appealing for Public Administrations in their work to make the building stock compliant with European Directives, in particular the EPBD (Council of the European Union, 2023b). The automation could consider also the implementation of an Artificial Intelligence algorithm, automatically correlating input data to an energy class: this would be particularly relevant when extending the AoI and therefore increasing the amount of training data.

From the scientific point of view, this work paves the way for the realisation of highly accurate UBEMs, simulating building performance on a district or urban scale by integrating remotely sensed pictures and EPC data for detailed archetyping. A detailed refinement of such methodology on building scale could eventually lead to the possibility of issuing EPCs without the need for extensive on-site surveys, estimating the U-value and the necessary geometric parameters accurately.

Nevertheless, some weaknesses emerged. First, the limited extension of the AoI, constraining the

heterogeneity of the training samples – unfavoured by the homogeneity of the district too. Second, it would be relevant to perform the classification on limited segments of the building stock, in order to have a specific characterisation based on the building age and type. Finally, further information could be added such as the case of the window-to-wall ratio, a crucial indicator when assessing thermal losses; this could be derived from both the segmentation of a 3D model and the share between sunlit and useful surfaces in the EPCs.

Acknowledgement

This paper reports part of the work developed within the project NODES, which has received funding from the MUR - M4C2 1.5 of PNRR with grant agreement no. ECS00000036. Maria Ferrara's activity was funded by Italian MUR within the PON "Ricerca e Innovazione" 2014–2020, Asse IV "Istruzione e ricerca per il recupero" – Azione IV.4 – "Dottorati e contratti di ricerca su tematiche dell'innovazione" and Azione IV.6 – "Contratti di ricerca su tematiche Green. Further, this work was developed in accordance with the framework agreement between the City of Turin and the Polytechnic of Turin, signed on 9th February 2023, for the realisation of pilot projects towards the implementation of a Digital Twin.

Nomenclature

Symbols

AoI	Area of Interest
EPBD	Energy Performance of Buildings Directive
EPC	Energy Performance Certificate
EU	European Union
GIS	Geographic Information System
ROC	Receiver Operating Curve
SV	Surface-to-Volume
UBEM	Urban Building Energy Model

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