

Energy certification in construction: efficiency by imposition?

Making energy certification of buildings mandatory reopened an underlying question: does it make sense to impose by law what should be a demand from the market and from users?

Few regulatory measures in the building sector have prompted a debate as immediate as mandatory energy certification. The question was framed in very direct terms: should energy efficiency be imposed by law, or should it be a requirement that the market and users demand on their own?

The terms of the debate

The president of the Spanish Association for Quality in Building, Adrián Sánchez Molina, defended the need for energy certification in an interview broadcast on RTVE's 24 horas channel on 7 March 2013. His argument placed certification not as one more administrative step, but as a quality tool that makes it possible to measure and compare the energy performance of buildings against a standardised criterion.

The controversy, by contrast, points to a familiar tension: when a requirement arrives through regulatory imposition, it risks being reduced to a document that gets filed away, rather than a genuine commitment to the building's performance. The difference between the two readings is not a small one.

From the label to real performance

A certificate is useful to the extent that it reflects verifiable behaviour. At PAPIK Group we understand energy efficiency as a result projected from the first drawing and checked throughout construction, not as a rating obtained at the end. That logic underpins the Eskimohaus building system and the Passivhaus standard we work with, where performance is calculated and verified before the building is finished.

Seen this way, the debate over whether to impose certification is, at heart, a debate about how we guarantee that a home consumes what it claims to consume. Regulation can set the minimum; the way it is built determines the distance between that minimum and a house that truly works.

This is the same logic we apply both to new-build construction and to energy retrofit projects, where improving the building's performance is pursued as a technical objective rather than a box to tick.

A certificate confirms what has been built; it does not replace the way it is built.

