

Buildings' hydric sustainability: A necessary challenge

Portugal is known for its rich history and charming landscapes, but it faces increasing challenges connected to hydric management, specially within building context. The scarcity of hydric resources and climate changes introduce additional pressure on the need to adopt more sustainable practices in the building industry, including the use of water in the buildings.

Now, in this regard and to celebrate the World Water Day, the Agência para a Energia - ADENE (Energy Agency), while pursuing a crucial role in fostering these practices with the production of basic and framework directives for the industry, released the **AQUA+ Escritórios** - an hydric efficiency assessment methodology for buildings and offices.

This is the kind of practical actions that I congratulate, because I acknowledge that this is what the industry lacks so that, together with other industries, we may add a valid contribution to fight the scarcity of one of the most important resources for the human existence.

During this event, where the first seals AQUA+ Escritórios were handed, recognising office buildings with a good performance in this subject, I want to highlight the LUMNIA-EXEO building developed by AVENUE; and the Monumental building occupied by the BPI and developed by Merlin Properties.

Going back to the figures, it is important to understand what the buildings hydric efficiency optimisation represents in Portugal. According to the ADENE, it is estimated that the buildings "have a 30% to 50% potential hydric efficiency. As a consequence, the introduction of hydric efficiency solutions may generate a combined economy in water and power in the buildings around EUR 800 million every year in the domestic sector only. This is equivalent to over 51% savings in families' water bill". The agency also outlines that "The hydric efficiency generates new opportunities, such as new added value services, companies, jobs and trained professionals, therefore being essential for our country". I reaffirm that this should be our target: more efficiency for more economic development, because efficiency does not mean the industry slowdown. On the contrary, it can be a leverage tool for new innovation and business opportunities.

Beyond water savings during construction and in the buildings, we also know that water reuse is another key area for buildings hydric sustainability. Therefore it is crucial, for instance, the implementation of grey water and rain water treatment systems to reduce drinking water dependency for non-potable purposes, such as gardens irrigation, flushing sanitary equipment and cleaning exterior spaces.

However, despite the progress, there are still many challenges ahead. The lack of financial incentives and specific regulations may hamper the adoption of global sustainable practices measures. It is crucial that the Government and the industry stakeholders work together to develop policies and programmes fostering and encouraging investment in sustainable hydric solutions. Also, the community's literacy and engagement are key factors to encourage a water conservation culture.

In short, hydric sustainability in real estate and construction in Portugal is an intricate but essential and necessary challenge. Through cooperation between government institutions, industry organisations and the global community it is possible to reach a future where responsible water management is a priority in all aspects of the daily life and specially in construction, thereby ensuring a sustainable environment for future generations.