MERITA

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ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS FOR CULTURAL VENUES

Report of the Online Survey on Cultural Heritage Sites in Europe

By Punto 3

{KEY INSIGHTS & ACTIONS}

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Punto 3 PROGETTI PER LO SVILUPPO SOSTENIBILE

EUROPA NOSTRA

European Historic Houses

LE DIMORE DEL QUARTETTO

SURVEY SCOPE

This document presents a synthesis of a more detailed report, "**Environmental Management Analysis for Cultural Venues**" produced by **Punto 3** within the **MERITA project**. The purpose of this summary is to offer an overview of the current situation of historic houses in terms of environmental impact, while also providing **practical suggestions for improvement**. The full report can be requested by writing to *info@meritaplatform.eu*.

In the first half of 2024, Punto 3 conducted a survey of 42 heritage sites across Europe, mainly historic houses, which provides an important snapshot of current environmental performance in the cultural heritage sector. The analysis was conducted using the **Environmental Management Index (EMI)**, a tool designed to measure the adoption of sustainable practices. On average, respondents scored **11.5 out of 21**, a mid-range result that reflects encouraging progress in some areas while also pointing to significant opportunities for improvement.

The purpose of this summary is to offer an **overview** of the current situation of historic houses in terms of environmental impact, while also providing **practical suggestions for improvement**. It is intended as a useful resource for managers and owners of cultural sites who wish to strengthen sustainability strategies and align themselves with broader European goals for ecological transition. This document presents a synthesis of a more detailed report, "**Environmental Management Analysis for Cultural Venues**" produced by **Punto 3** within the **MERITA project**. The full report can be requested by writing to *info@meritaplatform.eu*.

Sustainability Outcomes Highlights

A snapshot of current strengths, gaps, and opportunities

Current Strengths

Of surveyed sites:

Green Transport Access

95% of sites reachable by sustainable transport

→ **Next step:** Formalise partnerships with municipalities or transport operators to increase frequency of public connections, provide cycle facilities, and actively communicate low-carbon travel options to visitors.

Waste & Cleaning

85% use separate waste collection
87% use green cleaning products

→ **Next step:** Move from partial to full adoption of eco-cleaning products and implement on-site composting systems to further reduce waste-to-landfill.

Lighting Efficiency

88% use efficient indoor bulbs
74% use green outdoor lighting

→ **Next step:** Retrofit remaining halogen/incandescent systems and install motion/occupancy sensors across common areas to cut idle energy use by up to 30%.

Key Opportunities

Environmental Policy

69% lack a formal environmental policy

→**Action:** Draft and publish a short policy aligned with EU EMAS guidelines, including measurable annual targets (e.g. % reduction in energy/water use).

Certification

Only **2%** hold environmental certifications

→ **Action:** Adopt EU Ecolabel, EMAS, or ISO 14001 to benchmark and communicate progress.

Energy Supply

66% don't use renewable energy

→**Action:** Transition to 100% renewable electricity contracts with Guarantees of Origin (immediate step) and explore feasibility of small-scale PV (solar panels), biomass boilers, or micro-hydro where context allows.

Water Efficiency

Many lack eco-flush toilets, aerators, rainwater collection

→ **Action:** Install low-cost systems to cut water use and heating costs.

Thermal Performance

Few sites have modern heating systems Half lack double glazing

→**Action:** Prioritise heating and insulation upgrades during restoration.

Cooling & Events

74% lack cooling → concerts limited to spring/autumn

→**Action:** Explore energy-efficient cooling options (e.g. A+ class systems, passive cooling, shaded outdoor events) to extend the concert season without compromising sustainability.

Inclusivity

Less than half offer accessible toilets or parking Only 9 sites fully accessible

→**Action:** Incrementally improve accessibility while protecting heritage.

Contextual Insights and Strategic Actions

Building on existing strengths

Waste management is among the best-performing categories. **85% of sites** reported having a separate waste collection system, and **87% use eco-friendly cleaning products**, with nearly a quarter relying on them exclusively. Some have gone further, introducing on-site composting and plastic-free policies. These measures not only reduce landfill waste but also reinforce a site's environmental identity through visible, visitor-facing actions.

Lighting systems also perform strongly. **88% of sites** have already switched to efficient indoor bulbs such as LEDs, and **74% have adopted low-consumption outdoor lighting**. A few also use solar-powered garden lights, combining efficiency with symbolic value in promoting renewable energy. The next step here is the wider adoption of **automatic lighting controls**, which can cut idle energy consumption by up to 30%.

Transport access is another area of strength. **95% of sites** are reachable by at least one environmentally friendly mode, such as public transport, cycling, or walking. Some venues collaborate with municipalities to provide bus links and cycle routes, showing how historic houses can actively promote low-carbon visitor mobility.

Key Opportunities for Improvement

The most evident weakness concerns **formal environmental governance**. **69% of sites** have no environmental policy, meaning sustainability actions are often ad hoc. Only **13 out of 42** sites have a written policy, and just four make it visible to visitors. Even concise policies aligned with **EMAS (EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme)** could help set measurable objectives and strengthen accountability.

Certification uptake is very limited: just **2% of sites** currently hold an environmental certification, with ISO 14001 the only example identified. Some pursue energy or forestry certifications, but there is no unified approach. Broader use of frameworks such as EMAS or the **EU Ecolabel** could help standardise practices, gain external recognition, and improve access to EU funding.

Energy supply also lags behind. **66% of sites** do not use renewable sources, relying instead on traditional grids or fossil fuels. A minority produce renewable energy on site, via photovoltaic panels, hydroelectric systems, or biomass, while others contract renewable suppliers with Guarantees of Origin. Scaling up these practices is one of the most direct ways to cut emissions.

Water efficiency is another challenge. More than **56% of sites** lack tap aerators or eco-flush toilets, and only **34%** use rainwater collection systems. These technologies are low-cost and deliver quick returns. For instance, aerators can cut water flow from 15 to 6 litres per minute, saving over 1,200 litres per month while lowering heating costs.

Thermal performance requires long-term investment. Only six sites use heating systems installed in the last five years, and about half lack double glazing. Some still rely on fuel oil, one of the most polluting sources, while others have adopted biomass boilers, heat pumps, or district heating. Conservation-grade secondary glazing is emerging as a way to balance efficiency with heritage protection.

Cooling represents a limitation for cultural programming. **74% of sites** have no cooling system, which explains the seasonal concentration of concerts in spring and autumn. Mediterranean sites sometimes use A+ class systems or rely on passive methods such as cross-ventilation and shading. Wider adoption could extend programming into the summer months.

Inclusivity is also underdeveloped. Fewer than half of respondents provide accessible toilets or parking, and only nine sites are fully accessible. Induction loops, adapted programmes, or multilingual signage remain rare. Incremental upgrades, supported by targeted funding, would allow sites to balance accessibility with heritage constraints.

Moving Forward

Overall Takeaways

Historic sites are making progress in **waste, cleaning, and lighting**, but the biggest gains lie in **policy, certification, renewable energy, water, thermal upgrades, cooling, and inclusivity**. Tackling these will:

- ➔ Cut operating costs
- ➔ Extend cultural programming
- ➔ Improve visitor comfort and inclusivity
- ➔ Strengthen access to EU sustainability funding

Within the MERITA project, an article written by **European Historic Houses** explores these challenges in depth, offering insights, practical suggestions, and innovative approaches to enhancing historic houses through chamber music. The article, titled "*Managing Historic Houses*", can be downloaded from the MERITA platform: www.meritaplatform.eu/resources.

PUNTO 3

Punto 3 is a consultancy company founded in 2003 that develops sustainability strategies for companies and territories. In particular, Punto 3 is active in the following areas Environmental Performance, UNESCO Awards and Territorial Marketing, Green Public Procurement (GPP), Sustainable Events, ESG, Climate Strategy. More information at https://punto3.it