

Argumentation tools: for the end users

For the persuasion of end-users

Depending on the exact legal background and the type of association end users live in, the different buildings have to gather different percentage of support to start and carry out a refurbishment process. However, it can be generally stated that at least 50% of the owners have to agree to start the process. In order to gather the adequate amount of support the following types of arguments can be employed, naturally adapted to the specific local circumstances and needs

Main arguments for refurbishment

Although each case is specific, and each case requires a careful overview of why refurbishment/interventions are necessary, the following five represent the main types of arguments that can be successfully employed to convince owners.

1. *Existence of subsidies* – Subsidies of different types – usually for the energy efficient refurbishment, the use of renewable energies, the conservation of heritage – exist all over Europe. The higher the subsidy rate, the easier it becomes to persuade owners to engage in refurbishments
2. *Cheaper energy prices* – a direct consequence of the refurbishment is often the decrease in energy expenditures. This argument is more useful in the CEE countries, where the energy prices are higher compared to the income of the residents. Calculation however must be very case specific, as the rate of return can be very long, depending on the type of intervention and the subsidy rate available.
3. *Higher comfort level* – this is the often underestimated argument, although universally in Eastern and Western Europe, investments into energy efficiency lead to nicer and more comfortable surroundings for the end-users, especially if the project is relatively complex. The increase in comfort level – e.g. better ventilation; increased potential for residents to regulate the temperature and humidity of their apartments; generally warmer building; nicer staircase and nicer outlook of the building; better functioning elevators – almost always becomes the main source of satisfaction for end users, surpassing savings and cheaper prices
4. *Growth of real estate prices* – in an increasingly competitive building environment refurbishments that for some time can give a competitive edge, will become a necessity. Already proven in the commercial retail sector, but increasingly true in the residential buildings, energy efficient refurbishments cause measurable price increase in the value of the individual apartments, especially as the real estate markets really begin to pick up
5. *Value driven arguments* - “green is good” and “the greener the better” could be arguments that can be employed partially supported by the subsidy system, partially by the public opinion that prefers the use of green solutions to minimize environmental damage and green house effects. Green consciousness can be best used in a German or a Nordic environment, whereas end-users in the CEE countries are likely to be less open to arguments related to this.

As a general rule is should be stated that refurbishments can be best started if there is a problem to solve: end-users, irrespective of their income levels or general attitude towards the environment, will be most likely to engage in a refurbishment – which is a costly and a strenuous process - if there is something that already bothers them, or can be pointed out as a source of (imminent) future conflict/problem.

Methods

With regard to convincing the end-users, there is a wide variety of solutions available, the choice or the combination of which should depend on the available resources and the constituency of the residents – their habits, their availability, and their interests.

1. *Open debate in a forum or assembly meeting* – This is the most conventional method. Every building has to have assembly meetings, held at regular intervals – usually once a year. But for the initiation of a refurbishment project a special assembly meeting can be called. Such a meeting allows to dwell on:
 - a. why the refurbishment is necessary
 - b. what are the costs and benefits of the intervention
 - c. what are the exact aims and time span of the intervention
 - d. whether the refurbishment should be carried out in one step or in consecutive steps, somewhat dispersed in time (pros and cons)
 - e. designs can be modified, design options can be discussed
 - f. the possible choice of constructors/designers/planners can be introduced

Importantly, the assembly meeting is the place, where decisions can be taken with regard to the initiation of the refurbishment process, the preferred price and the selection of the construction and planning companies.

2. *Inviting experts – including constructors, energy experts and banks.* By inviting experts the managers can increase their power of persuasion and owners can actually get better information from real experts. This is a very good method to decrease the general level of distrust, which is often one of the biggest impediments of starting a refurbishment process. The experts can come as a result of the invitation of the manager/ one of the owners, but this can happen the other way round too: often small construction and tendering companies seek out the buildings with their offers as a way to expand their market.
3. *Preparation of flyers and reading materials* - this can be done both by the manager/management company or the private companies promoting energy efficient refurbishments. In either case they offer very effective means of convincing the owners, allowing them to study the arguments at home, and allowing the presentation of data and graphs about the possible advantages and planned costs
4. *Visual aids – both on and off line* – the effect and persuasive power of visualising should never be underestimated, as it is difficult to engage in an expensive process the result of which are hard to picture. Seeing the neighbour's already refurbished building can become the best argument for the start of a refurbishment process. But – in case that is not possible - computer based visual tools can be very useful to help the owners picture the results of an intervention. Such tools can also be used to set up intervention priorities, to really help to understand the aims of the owners with the refurbishment.