

Architectural heritage and Paris's sustainable dilemma: Keep the old or bring in the new... or both?

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Abstract

Now that the twenty-first century is upon us, Paris is facing the increasingly urgent challenge of becoming a sustainable metropolis standing firmly on its three pillars - economic, social and environmental - and even, perhaps, a fourth cultural pillar, if we include architectural heritage.

Like other unsustainable structures (notably the transport system), Paris's existing buildings need to be 'decarbonised' for a start! The City's energy transition agenda was set out in the "**Paris Climate Plan**" in 2007. Accordingly, buildings must improve their energy efficiency results in order to comply with new targets and standards. This could mean insulating the ornate Haussmannian façades, covering the typical Parisian zinc roofs with solar panels, or even knocking down some old energy-greedy buildings.

Yet, in terms of sustainability, Paris is facing a singular dilemma: almost all of its buildings are classified as part of its architectural heritage, which is a major asset for the world's most visited capital. The danger is that implementing energy transition policies will damage this heritage.

Indeed, difficult choices may have to be made in favour of the environment or other objectives, such as social inclusion, at the expense of preserving heritage. But are such choices really inevitable? Are compromises possible? Are there other ways of getting around the sustainability vs. architectural heritage dilemma? Couldn't innovation offer solutions? Where does Paris stand today in the energy transition process as far as its architectural heritage is concerned? Who sets the rules? Who implements changes? Where does the money come from?

Five years after the Paris Climate Plan kicked in, what good and bad practices can be put forward as lessons for the future and for other cities? And finally, can this transition wake up Paris's slumbering economy?