

Technical Building Inspection (ITE)

What is the ITE?

The Catalonia Parliament decree 187/2010 of 23 November dealt with Technical Building Inspection for the first time in Catalonia, enacting the Right to Housing Act 18/2007 of 28 December which set out the obligations of house owners to keep buildings in good condition and encouraged the refurbishment of the existing building stock in order to avoid degradation.

Methodology and deadlines

The aim of the ITE is for owners of all existing buildings (excluding detached houses) to obtain a Fitness Certificate issued by the Housing Agency of Catalonia by presenting a report written by an architect, architectural engineer or quantity surveyor, following a standard template. The report must contain the results of a visual inspection that categorise any deficiencies found as minor or major. For more detailed information, visit the website of the Generalitat of Catalonia at: <http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/territori/menuitem.e1e49320d2ba69c3aacf3010b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=0397388050928310VgnVCM1000008d0c1e0aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=0397388050928310VgnVCM1000008d0c1e0aRCRD&vgnnextfmt=detall&contentid=a229978e7779a310978e7779a3108d0c1e0aRCRD&vchannel=79140103841bb110VgnVCM1000008d0c1e0aRCRD>

The decree also establishes deadlines for existing building stock. Buildings erected between 1931 and 1950, for example, will be required to have a Fitness Certificate before 31 December 2013.

Refurbishment

Instead of discussing the ITE or how to obtain the Fitness Certificate - something that we would rather do in person - we would like to emphasise the role of the ITE in boosting the refurbishment of existing building stock. At MARquitectura, we believe firmly that refurbishment of existing buildings is a necessity and not only that, must become the foundation of architecture in years to come. During the years of the property bubble, we left aside refurbishment on a massive scale in order to focus on new builds, creating whole new neighbourhoods that needed new infrastructure and new roads, and horizontally expanding our towns and cities without remembering that we had (and still have) whole neighbourhoods with infrastructure already in place (needing no more than a minor refurbishment in most cases) which we neglected and let degrade unnecessarily. At the same time, the horizontal sprawl of urban areas brought with it an excessive use of land and the creation of residential areas without commercial activity (and very often with insufficient or non-existent public transport, encouraging the use of private vehicles), and high maintenance costs (lighting, rubbish collection, road maintenance, etc.) which cannot be met by local authorities in times of economic crisis.

European framework

Refurbishment has been a cornerstone of the building sector in other European countries for many years and represents the majority of undertakings. In Germany for example, recent figures highlight that 62% of construction is taken up by the refurbishment sector, while only 38% by new builds. In Spain the number of refurbishment projects has barely reached 25% in recent years. It is therefore a field with huge growth potential that allows for the preservation and boosting of built-up areas and existing urban fabric, as opposed to the unnecessary erecting of new infrastructure that requires excessive financial investment in both construction and maintenance.

Is the ITE useful?

Unfortunately, figures from the first two years since the decree was implemented show that the ITE has been purely paperwork, as has been the case in other Autonomous Communities in Spain where similar technical inspections have been put in place (Madrid, Balearic Islands, Andalusia, etc.). Only a tiny percentage of approximately 50,000 buildings in Catalonia built before 1931 that require the certificate have actually obtained it.

As already mentioned, at MARquitectura we believe that the ITE should not only be a matter of getting a piece of paper accrediting that the building has undergone the obligatory revision but that it should be one of the tools to help us encourage the refurbishment of existing buildings and neighbourhoods and one that represents enormous potential for job creation. In Germany, for example, we said earlier that refurbishment has considerable importance within the building sector, resulting in the creation and maintaining of 140,000 jobs between 2006 and 2009. We firmly believe in the ITE and refurbishment more generally, but focused within an overall framework to boost and incentivise the sector.

