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Federation of European Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Associations

SIMIACCI

Press Release

Horizon Europe Project SIMIACCI Launches Its first public webinar, organised by REHVA: **Conservation vs. Efficiency: the IAQ challenge for cultural Institutions**

Brussels, 22/09/2026 — REHVA (Federation of European Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Associations) hosted the first webinar of the SIMIACCI project series, *"Conservation vs. Efficiency: The IAQ Challenge for Cultural Institutions,"* bringing together conservation, manufacturing and academic expertise to address a question facing galleries, libraries, archives and museums across Europe: can cultural heritage be protected without holding back the energy transition?

A roundtable across disciplines
Moderated by REHVA's Technical and EU project Officer Consultant Pablo Carnero, the webinar gathered Anaïs Ortiz, Head of Preventive Conservation at the Archives Nationales de France; Werner Adler, Head of Marketing, Communication & Public Affairs at Condair; and Professor Manuel Carlos Gameiro da Silva of the University of Coimbra, alongside policy framing from REHVA's Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer Francesco Robimarga and an introduction to the SIMIACCI project from its coordinator, Professor Moisés Pinto (Instituto Superior Técnico, University of Lisbon).
The discussion addressed a long-standing assumption in the sector: that the tight, fixed climatic conditions traditionally used to protect collections are incompatible with the reduced energy consumption now required of European buildings under EU climate policy.

Key findings from the discussion

- **The conflict may be a legacy of convention, not evidence.** Panellists agreed that many of the fixed temperature and humidity set points still specified today (commonly 18–20°C and 50% relative humidity ± 5%) were never firmly grounded in material science, and in some cases can be traced to individual design decisions, later copied across the sector without further scrutiny.
- **Risk-based, adaptive ranges can deliver substantial energy savings.** The Archives Nationales de France now manages its climate within a wider band (16–24°C, 40–58% RH), controlling for the *rate of change* rather than a fixed value, with an energy model projecting savings of around 60%.
- **Ventilation should be designed around actual air quality needs, not fixed volumes.** Oversized "safety margin" ventilation was highlighted as a significant and often unnecessary energy cost, since doubling an air change rate can increase energy consumption roughly eightfold.
- **Monitoring is the precondition for flexibility — but it must lead to action.** Panellists stressed that wider operating ranges can only be justified with continuous, reliable monitoring paired with clear performance thresholds and response protocols; monitoring without follow-through is simply data collection.
- **Structural barriers remain outside engineering control.** Loan agreements and insurance contracts between institutions frequently impose rigid climatic requirements regardless of a building's own evidence-based practice, and airborne pollutants originating from artefacts themselves remain difficult to monitor and address through ventilation alone.

Why it matters

The webinar's conclusions point to a shift already underway in how HVAC systems for cultural heritage buildings are specified, controlled and monitored: from a single ideal set point toward zoned, risk-managed operation that can meet both conservation and energy efficiency objectives. The panel agreed that most conservation professionals are ready for this shift, and that the main barriers are contractual and resource-related rather than a lack of will.
This was the first in a planned series of SIMIACCI webinars.

About SIMIACCI
SIMIACCI ("Sustainable Intelligent Management of Indoor Air Quality for the Cultural and Creative Industries") is a Horizon Europe project running 2025–2028, coordinated by Instituto Superior Técnico (University of Lisbon) with 15 partners across seven countries. **SIMIACCI** aims to revolutionise indoor air quality management in Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums (GLAMs) by implementing innovative solutions that significantly reduce energy consumption while safeguarding cultural heritage.

About REHVA
REHVA (Federation of European Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Associations) represents the HVAC engineering community across Europe, promoting energy-efficient and healthy indoor environments through research, publications, events and active participation in EU-funded projects addressing the built environment.

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