Simplifying Smart Readiness: A Novel Tool for Rapid SRI Assessment in European Buildings

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Abstract— This paper introduces a groundbreaking tool developed under the EU-funded project Smart Square, designed to simplify the calculation of the Smart Readiness Indicator (SRI) for buildings. This innovative tool addresses the urgent need for an efficient and user-friendly methodology to assess the smart readiness of buildings, presenting a streamlined approach to SRI assessment. Its architecture and calculation procedures are tailored to facilitate rapid and simplified SRI calculations, making it highly accessible to a diverse range of stakeholders, including building owners, facility managers, and policy makers. Crucially, this tool is also designed with call centres in mind, offering a novel approach to building certification. This paper will delve into the rationale behind utilizing call centres for building certification, demonstrating how this strategy can significantly enhance the efficiency and scalability of SRI assessments. By leveraging a user-centric design, the tool efficiently processes building data to produce accurate and understandable SRI calculations. Examples of certificates extracted using the tool will be showcased, highlighting its practical application and the ease of generating comprehensible results. The implications of this tool are profound for the widespread adoption and establishment of the SRI across Europe, providing a much-needed solution to one of the main barriers to its uptake. The development of this tool marks a significant advancement in promoting smart and sustainable building practices across the continent, aligning with the European Union's objectives for energy efficiency and digital transformation in the built environment.

Keywords: Smart Readiness Indicator (SRI), Assessment, Tool, Simplified Method.

I. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of urban development, the integration of intelligent technologies in building infrastructure is not just an option, but a necessity for sustainable progress. The concept of "smart buildings" extends beyond mere energy efficiency and cost-effectiveness; it embodies an ecosystem where building operations enhance occupant comfort, safety, and productivity while actively contributing to the overarching goals of urban resilience and environmental sustainability. Central to realizing this vision is the Smart Readiness Indicator (SRI), a measure that quantitatively assesses a building's capacity to adapt its operation to the needs of the occupant, while optimizing energy consumption and interacting efficiently with the grid. The urgency to develop robust, scalable, and user-friendly tools for SRI assessment is driven by the European Union's ambitious targets to lower carbon footprints and enhance the smart readiness of buildings across the continent. In this context, the "Smart Tools for Smart Buildings" project under the LIFE-2021-CET-SMARTREADY Grant has been essential. The project not only seeks to bridge the gap between technological potential and its practical application but also addresses significant barriers to the widespread adoption of SRI.

This paper presents the development of an innovative tool, forged under the auspices of the EU-funded project Smart Square. This tool revolutionizes the approach to calculating the Smart Readiness Indicator by simplifying the process, thereby making it accessible to a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including building owners, facility managers, and policymakers. By integrating user-friendly interfaces with comprehensive backend architectures, the tool offers a simplified yet effective method for rapid SRI assessments. Moreover, the incorporation of call centres as a novel strategy for building certification is discussed, highlighting how such an approach can significantly enhance the scalability and efficiency of SRI assessments. The call centre method utilizes a streamlined questionnaire to rapidly collect essential data from building operators, which is then processed to generate immediate, reliable SRI scores.

The implications of deploying this tool are profound, potentially catalyzing the widespread establishment of the SRI across Europe, thus supporting the EU's objectives for a smarter, more sustainable built environment. This paper explores the conceptualization, development, and application of the Smart Square tool, illustrating its potential impact through practical examples and discussing its role in promoting intelligent building practices across Europe.

II. Methodology

The methodology section is structured around the design, development, and validation of the novel Smart Readiness Indicator (SRI) tool. This tool is aimed at simplifying the process of assessing the smart readiness of buildings across Europe, thereby facilitating widespread adoption and standardization.

A. Tool Design and Architecture

The initial phase of the methodology focuses on the design and architectural blueprint of the tool, which is aligned with the European Union’s guidelines for the Smart Readiness Indicator. The architecture of the tool integrates both frontend and backend components to ensure user-friendliness, robust data processing, and secure storage (Figures 1-2). The user interface (UI) is designed to be intuitive, enabling users from varied backgrounds to navigate effortlessly through the tool. It includes input forms for data entry, dashboards for results display, and guides for users on how to perform assessments effectively (Figure 3). The backend architecture is crafted to handle data efficiently, ensuring fast processing and reliability. It utilizes cloud-based services for scalability and integrates APIs for various functionalities like data retrieval, data processing, and user management. A distinctive feature

of the tool is its integration with call centres, designed to facilitate the use of the tool by building operators and owners who may not have direct access to digital platforms. A streamlined questionnaire is used to collect data, which is then processed by the tool to generate the SRI score.Data Collection and Processing

Data collection is a critical component of the methodology, involving the acquisition of necessary information from building operators through both digital forms and call centre interactions. The data encompasses various parameters such as energy usage, building automation systems, and the integration of renewable energy sources. Users input data through the tool's frontend, which is then validated by the backend to ensure accuracy and completeness before processing. Also a structured questionnaire is used to gather data, which is designed to capture all relevant information required for an SRI assessment without necessitating technical expertise from the respondent.

B. Calculation Algorithms

The core of the tool's functionality lies in its calculation algorithms, which are designed to process the input data and generate an SRI score. These algorithms adhere to the European Union's SRI framework and are tailored to evaluate the smart readiness through a series of metrics. The algorithms are designed to assess multiple aspects of building performance, including energy efficiency, system interoperability, and user adaptability. The tool calculates scores based on predefined criteria that reflect the smart capabilities of the building. The scoring system is developed to be transparent and understandable, providing clear indications of how each parameter influences the overall SRI score. This system allows users to identify potential areas for improvement.

C. Validation and Testing

Before its full deployment, the tool underwent extensive validation and testing to ensure accuracy, reliability, and user-friendliness. This phase was critical in establishing the tool's efficacy in real-world scenarios. The tool was initially rolled out in a controlled environment involving a selected group of buildings across different European countries. Feedback from these pilot tests were used to fine-tune the tool. Feedback from a diverse group of stakeholders, including building owners, facility managers, and policy makers, was collected to assess the tool's practicality and to make necessary adjustments. Based on the feedback, the tool was refined through multiple iterations, enhancing its functionality and user interface. Each iteration was followed by a testing phase to validate the improvements.

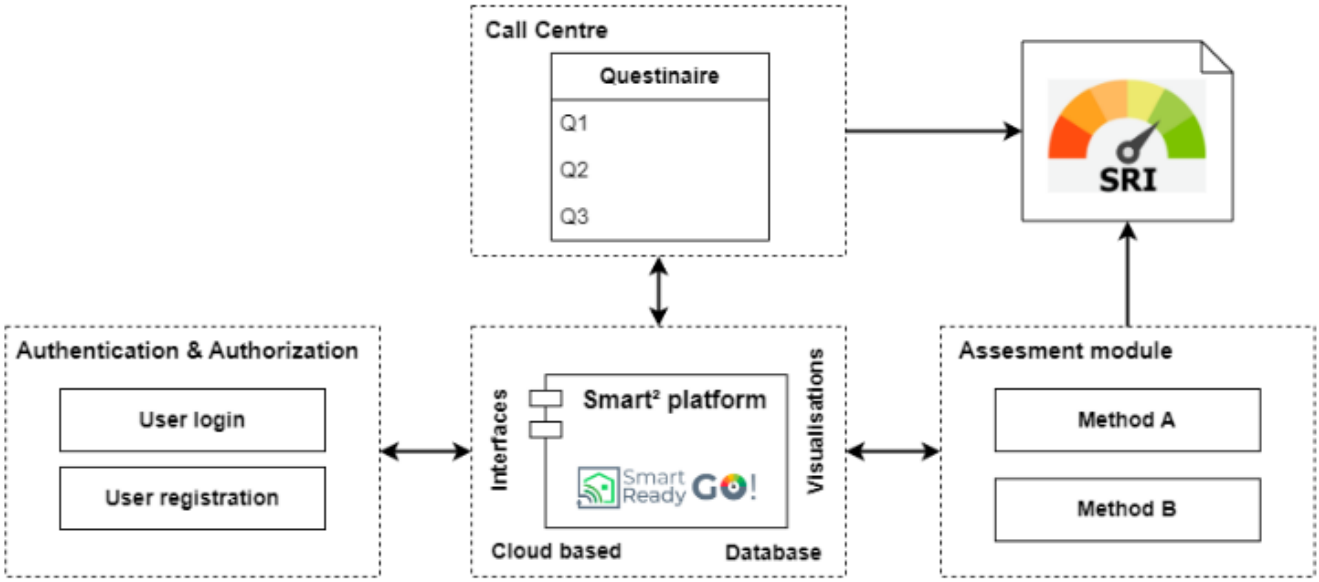


Figure 1: Smart2 Initial Architecture structure

III. Results and Discussion

A. Analysis of Tool Performance

The detailed analysis of the tool's performance across various test scenarios revealed insightful trends and some unexpected outcomes. The tool was applied to a wide array of building types, including residential, commercial, and industrial facilities. Graphs and charts depicting SRI scores demonstrated a clear correlation between newer, more technologically integrated buildings and higher SRI scores, while older buildings without recent updates generally showed lower readiness scores.

Data visualization also highlighted variability in SRI scores within similar building categories, indicating that mere architectural type or usage does not solely predict smart readiness. For example, two commercial buildings of similar size and age sometimes displayed markedly different SRI scores, which prompted further investigation. Upon analysis, it was found that the discrepancies often arose from differences in the implementation levels of smart technologies—particularly in energy management systems and IoT integration.

Additionally, user group analysis revealed that facilities managed by teams with specific training in smart technologies consistently scored higher, suggesting that both physical and human factors significantly influence a building's smart readiness. These findings underscore the complex interplay of technology, management practices, and building characteristics in determining smart readiness, pointing to areas for focused improvements and further research.

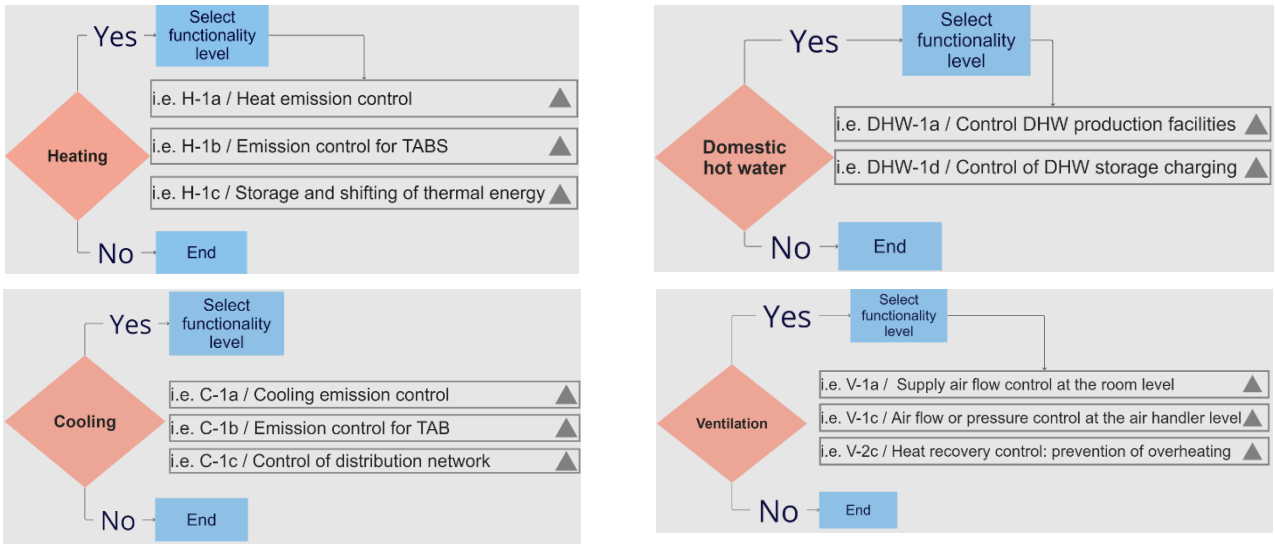


Figure 2: SMART^2 tool – flow diagram

B. Challenges and Limitations

During the development and deployment of the Smart Readiness Indicator (SRI) tool, several challenges and limitations emerged that affected its effectiveness.

- One significant issue is related to data integration, where inconsistencies in data format and completeness across different building hindered seamless processing. This challenge is particularly evident in older buildings where records may be sparse or non-standardized, affecting the tool's ability to accurately assess and generate reliable SRI scores.
- User interface problems also may surface, especially regarding the tool's usability across diverse user groups. Some users may face difficulties in navigating through the assessment modules, particularly users with lower digital literacy rates, which could potentially limit the tool's adoption and impact.
- The call centre method, while innovative, may face limitations in reaching a broader demographic. Challenges include language barriers and the varying levels of understanding of smart technologies among users which could introduce biases or errors in data collection. To address these issues, several improvements are recommended.
- Enhancing data integration capabilities through the adoption of more robust and flexible software architectures that can accommodate a variety of data sources and formats is crucial.
- Improving the user interface with more intuitive design and multilingual support can enhance accessibility.
- For the call centre method, implementing automated, AI-driven response systems could reduce human error and expand operational hours, increasing the tool's reliability and scalability.

C. Future Research Directions

The initial findings from the deployment of the SRI tool suggest several promising directions for future research.

- Technological enhancements, such as the integration of machine learning algorithms, could be explored to improve the tool's predictive accuracy and capability to handle complex data sets.
- Expanding the tool's capabilities to include more complex buildings, such as mixed-use developments and large industrial facilities, could broaden its applicability and impact. This expansion would necessitate the development of advanced modules that can assess diverse systems and their interactions within these larger infrastructures.
- Long-term studies on the impact of SRI implementation on energy consumption and occupant behavior represent another vital research avenue. Such studies could track the long-term benefits of smart building technologies, providing data to further refine SRI assessment criteria and validate the tool's effectiveness.
- Investigating the correlation between high SRI scores and actual energy savings or improved occupant satisfaction could significantly strengthen the case for widespread adoption of smart technologies in buildings.
- Additionally, exploring the integration of sustainability metrics into the SRI assessment could align smart building practices with broader environmental goals, such as reducing carbon footprints and promoting renewable energy use. This holistic approach would not only enhance the functionality of the SRI tool but also contribute to the global effort towards sustainable development.

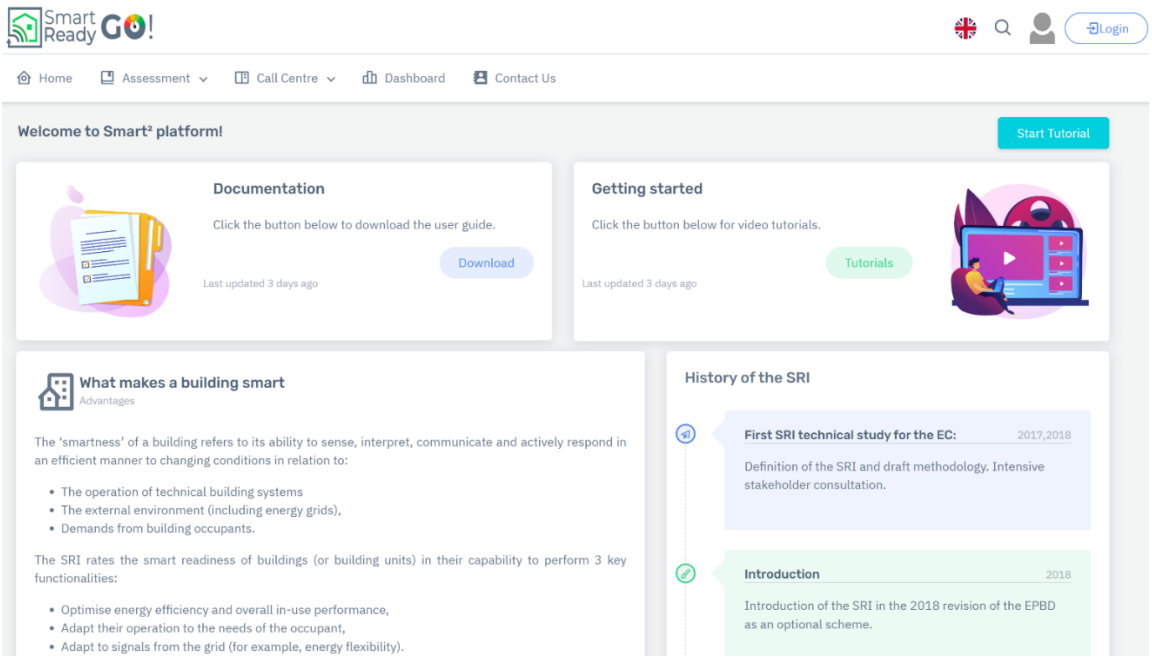
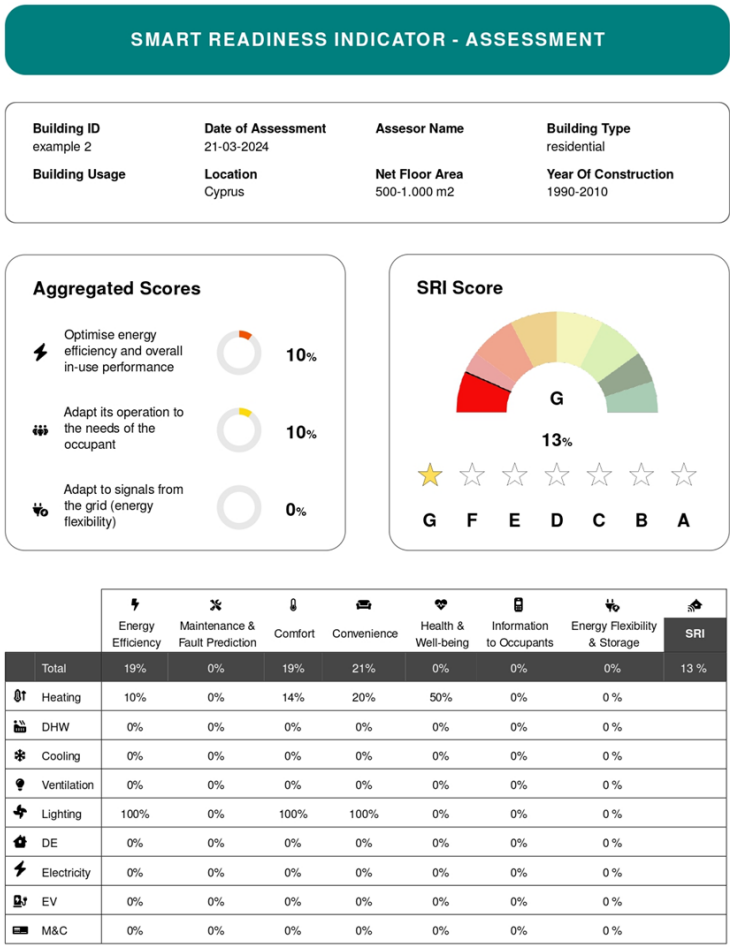


Figure 3: Smart2tool UI - Home page



		Energy Efficiency	Maintenance & Fault Prediction	Comfort	Convenience	Health & Well-being	Information to Occupants	Energy Flexibility & Storage	SRI
	Total	19%	0%	19%	21%	0%	0%	0%	13 %
	Heating	10%	0%	14%	20%	50%	0%	0 %	
	DHW	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0 %	
	Cooling	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0 %	
	Ventilation	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0 %	
	Lighting	100%	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0 %	
	DE	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0 %	
	Electricity	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0 %	
	EV	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0 %	
	M&C	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0 %	

SMART2 Funded by the ©European Union, under the Grant Agreement N° 101077241. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Figure 4: Smart²tool SRI Assessment

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The development and deployment of the Smart Readiness Indicator (SRI) tool represent a significant advancement in assessing the smart readiness of buildings across Europe. The tool has demonstrated its capability to streamline the SRI assessment process, making it accessible to a broad range of stakeholders, including building owners, facility managers, and policymakers. The incorporation of both digital and call center methodologies ensures that the tool is adaptable to various user needs and technological access levels, enhancing its practical utility and scope of deployment. Quantitative results and qualitative feedback from the tool's application have highlighted its effectiveness in accurately evaluating and promoting smart building practices. However, the study also identified challenges such as data integration issues and user interface complexities, which could hinder wider adoption. Addressing these challenges through technological enhancements and improved user interface design is crucial for future iterations of the tool. Looking ahead, there is substantial scope for further research to refine the tool's capabilities, particularly in integrating advanced technologies like AI and expanding its applicability to more complex building types. Such improvements will not only enhance the precision and reliability of the assessments but also foster a deeper integration of smart technologies into the European building stock, contributing to the EU's energy efficiency and sustainability objectives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study is part of the dissemination activities of the research project ‘Smart Tools for Smart Buildings: Enhancing the intelligence of buildings in Europe (Smart Square)’ (Grant ID Number 101077241), funded under the Horizon Europe call LIFE-2021-CET-SMARTREADY.