

INTERVIEW

Solar Energy in Urban Planning

Interview with Maria Wall

The IEA SHC Programme is finishing its work on Solar Energy in Urban Planning (Task 51). To learn first hand about the impact Task 51 has had in this field, we asked Maria Wall, the Task Operating Agent, a few questions as a teaser before next year's wrap-up article on the Task's results.

Why was this work needed?

Maria Wall (Maria): Urban planning rarely includes solar energy planning today. Traditionally, only daylighting and the "right to light" have been considered when planning urban areas. However, since electric lighting came into use in the 20th century even simple rules for harvesting daylight were forgotten. Today, we have access to active solar systems and daylighting strategies, but how to ensure solar access for buildings and urban areas for the long term is not clear. Work is needed to build up knowledge, to develop methods, tools and guidelines, and to improve education and knowledge transfer.

What were the benefits of doing this work thru the SHC Programme?

Maria: What you invest in time you get back multiplied. Plus we could learn from each and avoid making the same mistakes and could be inspired by what other countries are doing to overcome specific barriers. Also, working with an international team meant that the approaches, methods and tools we developed could be used in different municipalities and countries.

What, if any, result surprised you?

Maria: Maybe how effective the action research was in our different countries and municipalities. The cooperation with local actors really created a win-win situation.

What is the most important deliverable of the Task and why?

Maria: It is hard to say since the different deliverables were so interlinked. All the results are very important and most of them benefited from the Task's action research structure that relied heavily on case studies, which was the core of the Task.

Are any Task deliverables being used by end-users yet?

Maria: Yes, the Swedish city of Malmö has invited one of the developers of the LESO-QSV method, which supports municipalities with the process of defining suitable areas for solar integration and their acceptability levels. Maria Cristina Munari Probst of LESO-EPFL in Switzerland will help the city through the process so that it can make informed decisions when future building permits are handled and be pro-active in supporting solar integrations. This is a great example of the benefits of international collaboration.

How has your Task work supported capacity building?

Maria: Perhaps the most important way is through knowledge transfer to municipalities and other key actors. Task experts were involved in real planning situations, which were a way for all involved to learn, but also a way to disseminate Task results.

What is the current status of solar energy in urban planning?

Maria: Urban planning still seldom includes solar energy issues. Although many good examples of planning processes, methods and tools exist, planning rules in general treat sunlight as an amenity and not a sustainability issue. We need to keep working on overcoming barriers and making further developments! And, not forget that more education is needed in this area.

We also worked on solar landscape planning, which is an even less developed research field. I am sure this will be developed further in the near future as the number of large scale solar fields is continuing to grow.



What is the future of this field?

Maria: The work with solar planning has just begun, especially within the framework of sustainable cities and as part of the renewable energy push for the "right to light" for daylight and solar energy production. We will also see many more initiatives from municipalities and developers, which will increase the need for knowledge and support methods and tools. And then there is legal reform, which many countries will need to ensure solar access protection.

Will we see more work in this area in the SHC Programme?

Maria: Yes, definitely needed. As a matter of fact several SHC Task 51 participants are discussing ideas for a new SHC Task. However, we are careful to first focus on finalizing our work in Task 51!

Did the Task work on/support any standards?

Maria: No, but it could maybe be part of future work. New standards are being discussed in Europe and globally.

Reports and other information on SHC Task 51 can be found at <http://task51.iea-shc.org/>