Authorisation procedures for SDH plants

Subject:	Authorisation procedures for SDH plants
Description:	This document describes the measure implemented in WP3 regarding the study and standardisation of the authorisation procedures for SDH plants in the Region of Veneto.
Date:	01.06.2017 (revised on 12.02.2018, second revision on 15.11.2018)
Authors:	Riccardo Battisti, Ambiente Italia
Document download:	www.solar-district-heating.eu/en/knowledge-database/

Summary description of the instrument

Region: Veneto

Partners involved: Ambiente Italia (SDHp2m partner), Region Veneto, Municipality of Feltre, Dolomiti Bellunesi Park, AGSM, AIM (local actors), Varese Risorse.

Short description of the measure.

Due to recent problems with medium and large-scale photovoltaic systems, the visual impact of ground-mounted solar plants is quite a sensitive issue in Italy, at both national and regional level.

To develop an SDH market in Veneto, therefore, it is of utmost importance to make all the local stakeholders aware of the differences between photovoltaic and solar thermal in terms of sizes and positioning of the solar modules. Ideally, reaching a standardisation of the authorisation procedures for SDH plants would be a key policy measure to foster the market deployment.

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 691624

Authorisation procedures for SDH plants

Initial situation

Italy has a very restrictive law on visual impact and visual protection due to its landscape peculiarities. In addition to that, laws at regional or local level can set even more restrictive rules on land use and visual impact for renewable energy plants. In the recent past, because of the high feed-in tariff incentives for photovoltaic, there has been a proliferation of medium and large-scale ground-mounted plants which created a quite negative image of solar energy, even in the general mass media. This caused a reaction by many Local and Regional Authorities, which are now very prudent when they have to deal with ground-mounted solar plants and, even though the problem arose because of photovoltaic systems, this naturally affects also solar thermal.

If such an obstacle could be less severe for potential SDH plants in technical areas of larger cities, it would be for sure more alarming for smaller plants in rural or mountain areas where landscape protection is quite a sensitive issue.

Objectives

The ultimate objective of this policy measure would be a standardisation, at regional level, of the authorisation procedures needed for developing an SDH project. Of course, the achievement of such a strong result depends on the political will and commitment as well as on the competencies of the Region and of its Municipalities since quite often they cannot draft pieces of legislation which are against the national law on visual impact and landscape protection.

Other objectives of this measure are:

- Make local stakeholders aware of the difference between solar thermal and photovoltaic and of the very low impact of solar thermal.
- Learn from the success story of the SDH plant realised in Varese despite the authorisation problems faced.
- Stimulate a common work among potential developers (utilities, Municipalities) and the Regional Administration.
- Extend the results to other Regions, first of all to Valle d'Aosta, the second Regional Administration working in the SDHp2m project.

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 691624

Measures and actions

The main steps and actions foreseen for reaching the above described objectives of this policy measure are the following:

- Awareness raising activity towards the Regional Administration and all the other relevant stakeholders, such as Municipalities, utilities, management structures of local and regional parks. The contents of this activity will focus on the energy density of solar thermal (and, therefore, land use), potential visual impact, success stories in other European countries.
- A common working group with the utility Varese Risorse as knowledge transfer actor and the Regional Administrations of Veneto and Valle d'Aosta as learning partners.
- Webinar on SDH plant in Varese to learn more about the authorisation procedure

Barriers and opportunities

The main barrier to be overcome to thrive this policy measure successfully is the mistrust and the consequent prudent attitude of the Regional Administration and of other local actors when it comes to ground-mounted solar plants, given the initial situation analysed in the above paragraphs.

Nevertheless, solar thermal is seen, at the same time, as a relevant opportunity for district heating to 'go green' improving the local acceptance of such an energy supply solution. Furthermore, heat produced by solar collectors can save biomass burning, thus reducing air pollution and preserving air quality which is a high-priority issue in both plain and mountain areas in Veneto.

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 691624

Authorisation procedures for SDH plants

Results

Ambiente Italia had a first exchange with the utility Varese Risorse in order to collect the key points of its success story and of the procedure used by the utility to overcome the authorisation issues related to the SDH plant. Based on this, an internal summary document has been developed by Ambiente Italia. This document was the starting point for approaching the Regional Administrations of Veneto and Valle d'Aosta.

Furthermore, a regional law developed by Valle d'Aosta for limiting ground-mounted installations of solar plants has been analysed and this was an additional element for the discussion with Veneto as well. Ambiente Italia also prepared a summary document on ground-mounted SDH plants, reporting about installation solutions realised in Austria and Germany, including the possible 'double use' of agricultural land which can still be used for farming.

A good opportunity to show the very limited visual impact and land occupation due to solar district heating was the workshop organised together with the Veneto Region in its headquarters in Venice on December 15th, 2017. The workshop was introduced and attended by the Director of the Regional Department of Energy who had the chance to see real examples of realised plants and their impact on the environment. Furthermore, the story of the development of the Varese plant was analysed in details during a specific webinar held on November 20th, 2018.

Lessons learned

The attitude of Regional Administrations is very prudent when it comes to ground-mounted solar plants. They are usually interested in SDH 'distributed' solutions, where not all solar collectors are installed on the same area but are rather split into several smaller 'sub-fields'; The areas used for the installation could be then smaller roofs of industrial areas or even residential buildings, as shown in many examples in Austria.

To understand the needs and to be able to overcome the authorisation barrier, then, it is important to highlight that the described attitude is also due to possible future complaints by citizens; Therefore, those stakeholders also are included in the discussion and in the awareness raising activities.

One additional lesson is that relevant stakeholders, such as policy makers, have a quite limited knowledge of solar thermal and of the extension of areas needed for their installation. Comparing these solutions to large-scale photovoltaic plants, they often overestimate the potential impact at local level.

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 691624