



Solar panels reduce both global warming and urban heat various country

Borhan Uddin^{1*}, Moynul Islam Emon², Mynuzzaman³

¹ Department of Mechanical Engineering, North China Electrical Power University, China

² Department of Electrical Engineering and its Automation, North China Electric Power University, China

³ Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture, China Three Gorges University, China

Abstract

The production of solar energy in cities is clearly a way to diminish our dependency to fossil fuels, and is a good way to mitigate global warming by lowering the emission of greenhouse gases. However, what are the impacts of solar panels locally? To evaluate their influence on urban weather, it is necessary to parameterize their effects within the surface schemes that are coupled to atmospheric models. The present paper presents a way to implement solar panels in the Town Energy Balance scheme, taking account of the energy production (for thermal and photovoltaic panels), the impact on the building below and feedback toward the urban micro-climate through radiative and convective fluxes.

Keywords: Introduction, Urban Canopy, description, conclusion

Introduction

Renewable energy is seen as a necessary step toward sustainable energy development, diminution of the use of fossil fuels and mitigation of climate change, as stated for example by Elliott (2000) [7]: “With concerns about Climate Change growing, the rapid development of renewable energy technologies looks increasingly important.” However, the recent analysis of Nugent and Sovacool (2014) showed that, when their complete life-cycle is considered, renewable energies are not CO₂ sinks yet. Nevertheless their greenhouses gas emission rate per unit of energy produced is much less than for energy sources based on fossil fuels and slightly less than for nuclear power.

Solar Panels into the Urban Canopy Model TEB

The objective of this section is to present how solar panels can be included in the Town Energy Balance (TEB, Masson, 2000) [16] scheme, in terms of both energy production and interactions with the roofs below (shading, modification of the roof energy balance, etc.). The solar panels themselves can be either photovoltaic panels or thermal panels that heat water.

1. Modeling Strategy

The solar panel exchanges energy with the other components of the system. Very few parameterizations taking these exchanges into account exist in the literature. The level of detail depends strongly on the objectives of the authors. On the one hand, when looking at the building scale, it is possible to consider some implementation characteristics of the panels, as in Scherba *et al.* (2011), who modified the Energy+ software (software dedicated to building energetics) to improve its previous solar panel model (which only computed the energy production).

2. Energy balance of the solar panel

Geometrically, the solar panels are assumed to be horizontal when calculating the radiative heat exchange with the other elements: exchanges between the roof, the solar panels and the sky above are considered to be purely vertical (Figure

1). Note that we take the inclination of the panel into account to calculate the irradiance for power production.

E_{prod} is the energy produced by the panel. It depends of the nature (thermal or photovoltaic) and characteristics of the panel, the irradiance on the panel, the inclination of the panel (not taken into account in the other terms), and the air temperature. Details are given in sections 2.5, 2.6 for PV and thermal panels, respectively.

H is the sensible heat flux from the solar panel to the atmosphere. We assume that the solar panel is thin, has no significant thermal mass and hence is in quasi-equilibrium. This means that the sensible heat flux, the only term that is not parameterized, is taken to be equal to the residue of the solar panel energy budget. Besides the fact that it is difficult to have a parameterization of this term, this ensures conservation of energy balance.

3. Modification of the energy balance of the roof

For the energy balance of the roof, the most important key parameter will, of course, be the proportion of roof area occupied by the solar panels. As mentioned above, we only consider the projection of the panels onto the horizontal surface (it would be absurd to make accurate calculations taking the inclination of the panels into account—except as noted above for production—when it is already assumed in TEB that all roofs are flat). The fraction of the roof covered by solar panels is noted f_{panel} .

The following simplifying assumptions are made:

- An average temperature is still calculated for the roof, without distinguishing between the parts of the roof under or beside the panel. This is reasonable, in particular for flat roofs with inclined panels, because the shadows cast by the panels can modify the radiative contribution to the roof beside as well as below the panels.
- The coefficient for heat transfer from the roof to the sensible heat flux is not changed (it is already in a heterogeneous environment with a roughness length of 5 cm).

- The effect of humidity on panels is neglected: the water interception reservoir treating rainwater and evaporation concerns the whole surface of the roof.
- The effect of solar panels on snow is neglected. The snow mantel, if any, accumulates uniformly on the roof. Note that snow might change the energy produced by the solar panel (but this is not taken into account yet).

This way of implementing the interactions between solar panels and the roof below allows the considerations of the way the roof is built to be separated from the question of whether there are solar panels on it or not.

4. Radiative Characteristics of Solar Panels

To establish the energy balance of the equivalent urban canyon, the TEB model needs the albedo (integrated between 0.4 and 2.5 μm) and the emissivity in the thermal infrared (integrated between 5 and 12 μm) for the following main areas: road, roofs, facades, glazing. The French Center for Aerospace Research (ONERA) laboratory maintains a current database of optical properties of urban materials.

At night, the impact of the solar panels is quite strong, even larger than during daytime, with cooling reaching 0.3 K. To the authors' knowledge, this effect is not investigated in the literature. This increased cooling at night is due to a combination of several urban micro-climate processes. First, the heat storage within the buildings is reduced in presence of solar panels, especially thermal ones, because they intercept the solar radiation. The implementation of solar panels as a separate element of the urban surface energy balance system, as done here, allows a fine description of their impact on the underlying building energetics. Second, at night, the urban boundary layer is much thinner than during the day (typically 200 m high instead of 1500 m high in summer). So any modification of the surface energy balance will have up to 10 times more influence on the air temperature at night. Such a counter-intuitive phenomenon was found by DeMunck *et al.*

This cooling effect, though relatively small, can improve the thermal comfort of the inhabitants. For example, it reduces the number of people exposed to any given intensity (e.g., 2 K) of the UHI by 4% ($\pm 0.5\%$) of the total population of the metropolitan area. The thermal comfort can also be evaluated by considering more environmental parameters, such as the wind, radiation and humidity, that all have an influence on human physiology. The Universal Thermal Climate Index, UTCI (www.utci.org/), is such an indicator. Figure 4 shows the proportion of the population of the urban area that is under moderate heat stress when outside (in shade). It displays the number of hours per day that a person spends in this or any stronger level of stress. Solar panels, probably by their effect of temperature, decrease the level on thermal stress of the population. For example, while 17% of the total population is affected by heat stress for more than half a day (12 h) in the present city, the implementation of solar panels would reduce this number to 13%. During the month of August, in the first half of which the famous 2003 heat wave occurred, the impacts of solar panels on air temperature would be larger. In daytime, the presence of solar panels would decrease the air temperature by more than 0.2 K, especially in the dense suburbs, where the density of solar panels is the highest, due to both the high density of building and the fact that unlike the Haussmanian buildings of the city center, the suburban apartment and

commercial buildings are flat roofed. This cooling value is consistent with, even though larger than, the value of 0.05 K found for the July 2005 heat wave episode in the Los Angeles area reported by Taha (2013) for present PV panels. When the efficiency of PV panels is improved (up to 30%), Taha (2013) predicts that the cooling will reach 0.15 K. There are two possible explanations for the fact that more intense cooling is simulated for Paris. First, the presence of the sea breeze in Los Angeles could limit local cooling due to solar panels in the city while extending the area of cooling by advection of the (slightly) cooler air. This can explain why a large portion of the metropolitan area of Los Angeles is impacted by the solar panels in these simulations. Second, only PV panels were simulated by Taha (2013). The efficiency of these panels was assumed to be relatively high (20%), larger than the value used in the present study, but much smaller than the efficiency of thermal solar panels (60%).

Conclusion

At night, the impact of the solar panels is quite strong, even larger than during daytime, with cooling reaching 0.3 K. To the authors' knowledge, this effect is not investigated in the literature. This increased cooling at night is due to a combination of several urban micro-climate processes. First, the heat storage within the buildings is reduced in presence of solar panels, especially thermal ones, because they intercept the solar radiation. The implementation of solar panels as a separate element of the urban surface energy balance system, as done here, allows a fine description of their impact on the underlying building energetics. Second, at night, the urban boundary layer is much thinner than during the day (typically 200 m high instead of 1500 m high in summer). So any modification of the surface energy balance will have up to 10 times more influence on the air temperature at night. Such a counter-intuitive phenomenon was found by DeMunck *et al.* (2013b) ^[6] for air-conditioning, which was shown to have more impact at night than in the day (although the heat release itself was, of course, larger in daytime). Here too, while the solar panels primarily modify the daytime processes (by absorption and transformation of the solar radiation into thermal or electrical energy), the influence on air temperature is larger at night, due to the urban fabric and the boundary layer structure.

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