Heat pumps – Obvious but… neither 'hot' nor 'cool'?

Major reference research organisations have placed heat pump technologies under very favourable light in recent years. For many good reasons, as heat pumps eliminate the need for undesirable fossil fuel imports, they decarbonise and make Europe's economy competitive by using renewable or waste energy. They offer smart and highly efficient solutions for the residential, commercial and industrial sector and can operate well in combination with other heating and cooling solutions.

It is striking however that - although the EU will not be able to meet its climate and energy goals without their massive deployment - heat pumps still seem not to deserve the same degree of attention from policy-makers as other clean technologies. In this regard, the Clean Energy for All Europeans' package adopted by the European Commission in November 2016 (currently discussed by the EU co-legislators) fuels the EU energy policy framework with fresh examples of the continuous "apathy" of policy makers towards heat pumps*. This is a serious issue, as the visibility granted to certain solutions over others conveys signals to potential private and public investors that would be able and willing to accelerate the deployment of sustainable solutions for our societies.

So why are EU policy makers so "shy" about heat pumps?

Heat pumps are not 'hot'…

A first possible explanation could be the **lack of awareness** on the functioning of heat pumps and on their multiple benefits for the consumers and the energy system, which makes it more difficult for policy-makers to spontaneously promote them.

Second, **technology-neutrality** has often been the leitmotiv of policy-makers, who argue that the promotion of one technology over another can distort the energy market and possibly lead to lock-in effects. However, it is worth noting that this concept has not been applied to other 'hotter' systems, which have been openly promoted across EU policies…

Or maybe it is the **double affiliation** of heat pumps to the communities of 'high-efficiency systems' and 'renewable technologies' that can explain their lack of visibility?

Heat pumps are not 'cool'…

Another problem could be their lack of physical visibility (compared with PV or windmills). This could prevent policy-makers from leaving a tangible legacy of their political achievements…
The difficulty may also come from the word 'heat pump' itself (and not only in English!), which is neither poetic, nor able to fully convey the integrative nature of the technology (that is also used for cooling, storage, etc.).

However, it is still possible to re-enchant policy-makers and make heat pumps 'hot' and 'cool' again. Therefore, it is crucial that the heat-pump community remains constantly active on raising awareness on the technology not only for tomorrow's desired green, competitive and digital EU, but also for today's.

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* In the proposed new Renewable Energy Directive, there is a specific article on district heating (article 24). There is no equivalent article relating only to heat pumps. Moreover, heat pumps are still the only renewable technology in that Directive subject to efficiency requirements (article 7) to be accounted for as renewable.
In the new proposed Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, the mentioning of 'heat pumps' as one of the 'high efficiency alternatives' to be considered by planners for new buildings (article 6) and renovations (article 7) has been removed from the text. In the same document however, considerable attention has been given to electric charging points for vehicles…

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