

COST-RELY Training School about policy and planning for renewable energy

In late May 2017 the COST-network on renewable energy and landscape quality (COST-RELY) held its second training school. Running for five days, it was held in Iceland under the title *Questions of Power and Participation: Renewable Energy and Landscape in Policy and Planning*. Organised by Prof. Karl Benediktsson and Dr. Edda R.H. Waage at the University of Iceland, an international group of trainers lent their academic expertise to the training school. These included Prof. Michael Roth (Nürtingen-Geislingen University, Germany), Prof. Tim Richardson (Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Norway), Dr. Bohumil Frantál (Institute of Geonics, Czech Republic), Prof. Finn Arler (Aalborg University, Denmark), Prof. Yves Michelin (VetAgro Sup, France) and Dr. Michael Meitner (University of British Columbia, Canada). Over 20 people from almost as many European countries participated as trainees, including practicing professionals, post-doctoral researchers, PhD candidates and Masters students, from disciplines spanning the whole spectrum from natural sciences to social sciences and humanities.



Figure 1. Participants of the COST Training School at Urriðafoss, a potential site for a new hydropower station (Photo: Karl Benediktsson)

1. ábra A COST Training School résztvevői az Urriðafosznál, egy új vízerőmű potenciális helyszínén (Fotó: Karl Benediktsson)

The course started out at the University of Iceland in Reykjavík. At the start, the participants were introduced to the energy situation of the host country, which is in many ways rather special as Iceland relies on renewable energy sources to a greater extent than any other European country (notably geothermal energy and hydropower). An extensive ongoing planning initiative, the “Master Plan for Nature Protection and Energy Utilization”, was introduced, with experts from the energy companies, NGOs, and the planning project itself coming to discuss different aspects of the plan. At the end of the day, the participants took a short hike into a geothermally active area close to Reykjavík, where they had the opportunity to bathe in a warm natural mountain stream.

During the second day, several existing and planned power production sites were visited, including the Hellisheiði geothermal power plant and several hydropower sites.



Figure 2. Observing steamy landscapes at Hellisheiði geothermal power station (Photo: Madalina Sbarcea)
2. ábra Gőzölgő táj megtekintése a Hellisheiði geotermális erőműnél (Fotó: Madalina Sbarcea)

The day ended in a rural hamlet in South Iceland, where the course was based for the next days. Under guidance from the trainers, groups of trainees worked with various themes, including scenario planning methods, strategic spatial planning, participatory simulation games, stakeholder analysis, public perception and measurement of attitudes, and relations between experts, politicians and the public in planning processes. The results of the group work were presented in an open workshop in Reykjavík on the fifth and final day.

The transition to renewable energy that is already underway requires sound policies and planning processes that are sensitive to landscape concerns. Training schools such as this are important means of furthering knowledge about how the complex issues surrounding energy policy and planning can be approached, and providing practical experience in the use of the myriad tools available for engaging the public in planning processes. Without such engagement, a radical and comprehensive shift towards renewable energy is unlikely to become a reality.

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