

Personal control over heating, cooling and ventilation

– Results of a workshop at Clima 2013

This article presents a summary of a Workshop at the 11th Clima World Conference 2013 in Prague. The workshop was organised by REHVA in cooperation with ISIAQ (International Society of Indoor Air Quality and Climate), and chaired by



ATZE BOERSTRA
BBA Indoor Environmental
Consultancy & Eindhoven
University of Technology,
ab-bba@binnenmilieu.nl



ANGELA SIMONE
DTU International Centre
for Indoor Environment
and Energy Department
of Civil Engineering,
asi@byg.dtu.dk



Objectives

The main idea of the workshop was to gather the opinions and ideas amongst the workshop participants about personal control over indoor climate and user behaviour. The workshop followed the introduced program reporting in details below.

Core of the workshop (2/3 of the total time) was devoted to a guided group discussion, between the participants. The discussion evolved around several prepared statements which were presented one-by-one (by the moderators). Every time a statement was presented the participants voted to indicate whether they agreed or not. Individuals were pointed out to explain their positions further, which lead to an additional group discussion.

Below the statements that were discussed are presented, with a description of the general response and 'average' opinion given by the participants.

Statement #1. We know how building occupants use their adjustable wall-thermostats and other controls

The majority of the participants disagreed (90%). Examples given to prove that we still have limited knowledge about the use of controls (specifically adjustable thermostats) were:

- In open-plan office buildings occupants may not adjust the thermostat as they believe that their uncomfortable thermal sensation is too subjective and an adjustment may cause complaints between colleagues. Additionally, it seems a common experience that many people (notably women) do not have a good idea of the functionality of control devices.
- In residential buildings: occupants often compare the use of the thermostats with the direct contact and perception and as a consequence they may adjust it wrongly. In fact, often people react to the instant thermal sensation because they do not know

the functionality of the HVAC system that is behind the control tool (it is not explained to them how the system works and how they can adjust it).

An additional opinion in the audience was that often we don't know where the thermostat is located and what it is really measuring. In fact, often it is attached to a wall at a very high or low place resulting in measuring some air temperature that is very different than the one perceived by the occupants.

One participant referred to the use and intrinsic logic design of smart phones. It would be nice when HVAC interfaces became as simple and intuitive as these phones.

Statement #2. Occupant behaviour and man-environment interaction related to indoor climate is complex

75% of participants agreed with the statement, the rest didn't express any opinion. The main comment was that the technical side of HVAC systems may be easy, but when looking at the interaction between building users and systems, things become complicated. Occupants should be free in their natural behaviour and HVAC systems and their control should allow for adaptation.

Statement #3. 100% satisfaction over the indoor climate (and a PD of 0%) is possible

A long discussion followed on this statement as the participants were split (50/50) between agrees and disagrees. The main discussed point was to choose on what to focus: building systems or occupant satisfaction?

The main argument of those that agreed was based on a few studies that showed that 100% of satisfaction can be achieved although, in that context, full control and local personalized environments must be provided to the occupant. From those that disagreed, it was believed that after some time of providing the perfect environment, human may start to complain, against any building service. In addition, psycho-social factors and other things that building scientists still do not see may make it near impossible to create 100% indoor climate satisfaction.

Statement #4. If you want to boost the productivity in an office building, give individual office workers control over their temperature and fresh air supply

The participants had very different opinions with 40% agreeing, 10% disagreeing and 50% no

opinion. In particular, while 40% agreed, the rest 60% pointed out that other aspects (e.g. psychological and sociological) also can influence productivity. The issues that should be considered could be divers (e.g. solar shading control) and also connected to the temperature and fresh air supply control (e.g. size/location of the controls).

Another considered aspect was the work distraction that the occupant can perceive when focusing at the different controls and spending time on adjusting them (or trying to adjust them). From that point of view, even if some scientists believe that occupants can learn and later have an easy fix of controls with high work productivity, others were more sceptic.

Statement #5. Building occupants want control over their indoor climate at all times

Most of the attendants (95%) disagreed with the statement. Many participants stated: "as long as the thermal environment is in the range of comfort conditions, the users' don't want to have control". This declaration was supported by real life experienced examples, e.g.: (1) in landscape offices, even if people feel the need to adjust the thermal environment they tend not to do it if they notice that the rest of the occupants are satisfied with the present conditions; (2) in homes or single office environments, people tend to use controls more often to reach a comfort state, however usually they have other priorities (work, family, etc.) and don't want to be bothered from a continuous room control need. Moreover, it was also noted that there are large difference between people: some want personal control others actually prefer central control. A conclusion was reached, that: "some building users may want to control their environment but certainly not all the time".

Statement #6. HVAC engineers want control over building occupants at all times

About 50% of the participants disagreed and only 10% agreed, 40% had no opinion. The 10% that agreed with the statement believe that HVAC engineers would like to have some control over buildings and their occupants so that they can guarantee e.g. a certain energy performance. On the other side, those who disagreed explained that the need for control is due to project budget issues and a false idea that engineers can avoid occupants complains.

Statement #7. The average HVAC professional knows how to select an adjustable wall-thermostat

Most of the audience (80%) didn't have an opinion; while the rest (20%) disagreed. The disagreements were explained by a lack of knowledge amongst HVAC professionals on ergonomics and user behaviour. Everyone seems to agree that more should be done in training HVAC-professionals better in the selection and installation of controls. Besides, developments of indoor environmental controls (like wall thermostats) should be supported for fast reading of the physical parameters that must be representative of the occupied zone (perceived temperature by the occupant).

Statement #8. Operable windows should be avoided

No doubts that operable windows should be mandatory, as almost all the audience quickly disagreed with the statement (95%). The main argument was that it is not just important to offer control over the thermal environment but also over fresh air supply and indoor air quality. One participant mentioned that this can be provided by other means than operable windows (e.g. boost knobs that influence the fresh air supply by a mechanical ventilation system).

Statement #9. Buildings with a user-adjustable indoor climate are more expensive

At this point the audience split almost equally in three groups: 30% agreed, 30% disagreed, 40% had no opinion. Many ideas and opinions were shared between the participants while explaining the different points of view. Statements in terms of agreement and disagreement are presented below:

- Yes, the building is more expensive and requires higher investment to provide more and adjustable personal controls.
- No, the building on the long run will be cheaper, because the building owner will have an immediate return on investment due to higher productivity of the building's users.
The discussion focussed on the fact that the price (initial costs) may be less relevant if end-results are perceived as important, e.g. more satisfied occupants.

Finally, the discussions turned on "occupant expectation". Expectations in expensive, high quality buildings are usually high and to reach high levels

of satisfaction possibilities for adjustable indoor climate should be provided. In cheaper, less luxurious buildings on the other side, occupants usually have lower expectations, and are more tolerant of the sub optimal indoor environments. However, compromising with occupants' satisfaction and acceptability in cheaper buildings is not always the best solution.

Statement #10. Including user control in HVAC system design will lead to higher energy use

About 40% disagreed; the rest mostly had no opinion. The discussion mainly focussed on the estimation of the energy savings that may change in connection with low temperature settings in winter and higher temperature setting in summer when using micro-climatisation systems. Conditions resulting from climate changes versus near zero energy buildings types are raising other issues as summer overheating. At the end the group agreed to disagree, meaning that the impact on energy use from inclusion of options for personal control depends very much on local climate, building design, etc.

Statement #13. There are business opportunities out there related to unfulfilled climate control needs

More than 90% of the participants agreed. There was general consensus that there are opportunities both in terms of products (e.g. more easy to use adjustable thermostats) and in terms of services (e.g. service contracts that include explanations and trainings to e.g. households on how to get the most out-of new complex energy systems).

Statement #15. REHVA should produce a separate 'Personal Control Guidebook' with concrete examples on how to design user-adjustable heating, ventilation and cooling systems

A total of 80% agreed, one person was against, the rest had no opinion. The general conclusion was that it is worth investigating the feasibility of a new REHVA guidebook on the subject of personal control and user behaviour related to the design / installation of HVAC systems.

Final conclusion

Exchange of knowledge, experiences and ideas on personal control over indoor climate between HVAC designers, component manufactures, building service system scientists, and others, was the main idea of the workshop. Indeed the workshop resulted in very good and interactive discussions.

There was consensus that personal control over indoor climate and user behaviour in the context of design and operation of HVAC is an important issue that needs further attention within the HVAC community both in terms of design and research. ■

The full version of the Workshop summary is published in REHVA Report No 5, Sevela P, Aufderheijde J (Editors) REHVA Workshops at Clima 2013 – Energy efficient, smart and healthy buildings, 2013. Available at REHVA Bookstore at www.rehva.eu.

News flash:

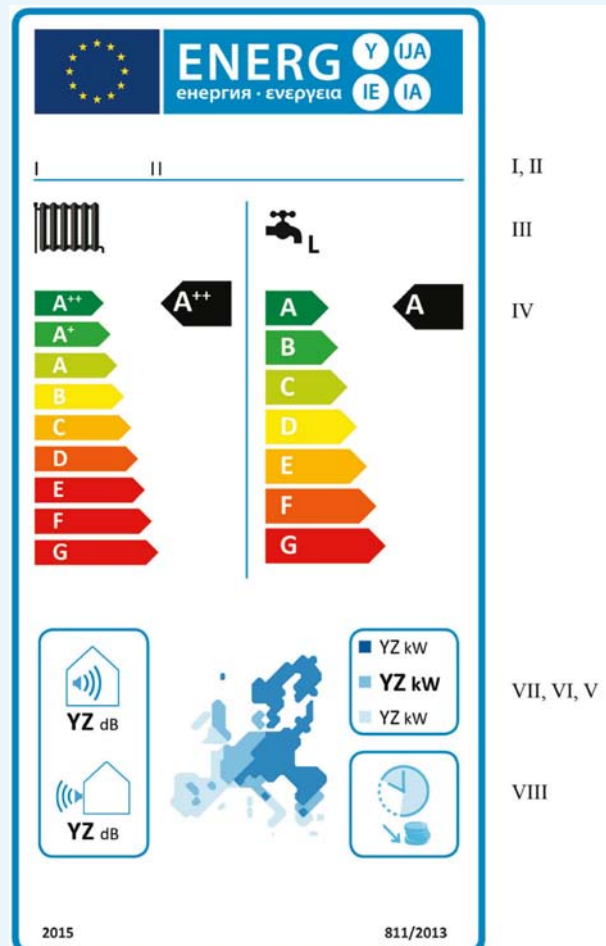
EU Regulations on space heaters and water heaters published on Sept 6th in the Official Journal of the European Union

After several years of discussions and preparatory work the Commission completed earlier this year the important regulations of space heater and domestic water heated like boilers, heat pumps and water tanks. The final versions of the Regulations were prepared at DG ENTER. The regulations are based on Energy Labelling and Eco-design of Energy Related Products Directives.

Regulations apply to all EU Member States without any further national legislation. The contents of the Labelling Regulations was as agreed in February and the Eco-design regulations in August 2013. The technical contents of the boiler regulations were introduced to the readers of the REHVA Journal in the March issue of the REHVA Journal

The regulations include:

- Energy labelling of space heaters, combination heaters, packages of space heater, temperature control and solar device and packages of combination heater, temperature control and solar device
- Energy labelling of water heaters, hot water storage tanks and packages of water heater and solar device
- Ecodesign requirements for space heaters and combination heaters
- Ecodesign requirements for water heaters and hot water storage tanks



An example of the mandatory energy label for heat pump combination heaters in seasonal space heating energy efficiency classes A ++ to G and in water heating energy efficiency classes A to G.

The full text of the regulations is available in the Official Journal, totally 188 pages.