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The change is inevitable.

We are moving towards a net zero emissions future to mitigate the effects of climate change. With solar energy leading the transition, the world needs vast areas covered with solar panels.

However, there are plenty of nations like Japan and South Korea where land is scarce. At the same time, nations with a high population density can’t afford to spare agricultural and industrial lands for solar panels.

For them, floating photovoltaics (FPV) or floatovoltaics technology seems like a promising solar trend. As the name indicates, the process involves floating solar panels on oceans or water reservoirs.

In this article, we will take a closer look at floating solar power plants and compare floating solar vs ground-mounted solar. But first, let’s see how they came to be, as well as how and why someone thought of tossing arrays of solar panels onto water surfaces.

To decarbonize the global electricity supply by 2050, solar energy penetrations should be between 20% to 60% across the globe. Now, the installation of utility-scale solar energy on land depends on multiple factors. The primary factor is the solar irradiance levels in specific zones.

If you consider Europe, solar irradiance and higher latitude are much lower than that of South Korea or India. So, the land use per unit of solar output will naturally have to be higher. To generate the necessary amount of solar power, 0.5 to 2.8% of the total territory in the EU should be used for solar panel installation. This can be around 1.1% in India, 3% in Japan, and as high as 5% in a country like South Korea.

With the world’s population now shooting up to over 8 billion, the pressure on arable land is ever-increasing. This is why many communities and activist groups regard conventional, ground-mounted solar farms as a direct enemy of farming – and they are not wrong.

Indeed, solar is a land-hungry power generator. One conservative estimate indicates that generating one megawatt (MW) of solar energy will require anywhere between 5 to 10 acres of land.

Another report by NREL suggests that land volume needed will depend on the solar technology used. However, the average land requirement is 3.5 acres/GWh/year in the US. In other words, powering 1,000 homes with solar electricity will require 32 acres of land.

Powering 1,000 homes with solar electricity typically requires 32 acres of land.

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“Land use is becoming a big issue for renewables. People are worrying about competing uses of land, and in some markets, you might struggle to find land,” explains Lara Hayim, the head of solar research at Bloomberg New Energy Finance.

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