

Towards Energy Sovereignty

We live our lives within in an economy which sustains itself primarily on the extraction and combustion of fossil fuels. This mode of production allows for the flow of seemingly cheap and abundant energy, but it has ultimately proved unsustainable—fossil fuels are an inherently non-renewable energy source, and they have had profound and lasting impacts on humanity and the environment.

Energy allows us to secure our most basic needs, but it has become a commercialized resource, with access determined not by principles of equity or of social and environmental justice, but by profit margins. The economic crisis that we are weathering has been exacerbated by the exhaustion of our fossil fuel reserves, and has made visible the human impacts of this energy paradigm. In Cataluña alone, more than 13% of the population lives in a state of energy poverty.

The same economic rationale also explains the energy situation of Cataluña: we possess vast renewable energy potential, but import much of our energy from those regions of the world that offer a better cost-benefit ratio for industry. Thus, we are left energy-dependent, while many of the costs of extraction are externalized and leave in the exporter countries a telltale wake of worker exploitation, violence, environmental destruction, pollution and poverty.

We live in a time in which rising gas prices and new forms of speculation in financial markets are driving the extraction of our last available resources. New techniques like fracking, and the exploitation of our coastal oil reserves and of uranium in Alta Anoià, do not correspond to the wishes of everyday citizens and will not yield positive results on their behalf. Today, we do not possess the ability to oversee or to direct our modes of energy production; we are not empowered to decide what, how, how much, and for what reasons we harness energy, but instead are mere clients of the large energy utilities.

We have composed our development model with these issues in mind. The paradigm of infinite growth and “cheap” energy has had lasting implications for land use policies and urban space—current city planning policies and the geographic distribution of our daily activities are highly problematic when it comes to energy efficiency. Transportation accounts for 40% of Cataluña’s energy consumption, and for a quarter of worldwide CO2 emissions. Practically all of these emissions are the result of the combustion of gasoline, a resource which the International Energy Agency says reached peak production in 2006.

We believe that it is imperative to break our energy-dependent habits and to change the way we think about energy. We must imagine and define the social model that we want to build in the coming decades, as this will inform our associated material needs. Given the impacts and inequalities that result from our present mode of production, we are convinced of the necessity of a complete overhaul of our system and philosophy, based on the following criteria:

- **Democracy:** We must be free to decide what we produce, how we produce it and, above all, for what ends we produce it. First and foremost, energy generation must meet social needs and criteria that have been identified collectively.
- **Social Control of the Means of Production:** Far from today’s oligopolistic systems, which have a vested interest in promoting ever higher levels of consumption, energy production must be governed with a non-commercial outlook. This can be ensured through public and/or community-based forums addressing the management of common resources.
- **Sustainability:** Fossil fuels, as finite as they are polluting, are not a forward-thinking choice. We must focus on renewable energy resources and use their various features and capabilities to imagine a path to system-wide sustainability. Likewise, it is necessary that we

rapidly and definitively close our country's nuclear centers, in order to avoid the possibility of future Chernobyl- and Fukushima-like disasters. Our nuclear centers are old and deteriorating; in Cataluña alone, there have been more than 220 operational problems since 2005, the majority of which have occurred in the reactors' containment buildings and control centers.

- **Energy Degrowth:** Renewable energy has sufficient potential to address humanity's basic needs, but it cannot sustain the consumption of today's wealthiest countries. These countries' prevalent lifestyles are highly energy-intensive, and energy is often used in ways that do not promote social and environmental wellbeing. We must radically change the model of growth that has brought us to this point, and employ a degrowth model of sustainable energy for wealthy economies. With such a model, renewable energy can provide for and prioritize our most basic social needs.
- **Roots in the community/decentralization:** Grassroots efforts are indispensable in reaching our goal of energy sovereignty. Unlike our current modes of production, which presuppose the accumulation of consumer goods at the highest levels of society, the new energy system must be built up from below. This means avoiding mythical magic bullets and top-down dictums, and replacing them with heterogeneous and diverse solutions, proposals originating in and adapted to the life of each community. This is the best guarantee of progress towards a new model of energy production.

In short, we are convinced that **energy sovereignty**, defined by the above concepts, is the only possible path to advance towards true equality, human rights, and harmony with our environment.