

ENERGY

Democratic control and the fight against energy poverty



A guide for municipalities

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At the end of 19th century, the defence of lumber thieves against the laws that protected private ownership of woods had already been proclaimed. Means have changed; injustices haven't.

Inspired by the lectures of Karl Marx in Rhenish Newspaper regarding the theft of lumber in private properties

Introduction

Municipalities are key stakeholders in the development of energy democracy. They work hand-by-hand with citizens and they can establish more efficient community policies. These locations represent the counterpoint against the globalisation policies stemming from neoliberalism that have proven to be unfair and environmentally poorly efficient.

In terms of democratisation of energy, we can analyse other European regions in order to find examples of good practices. In this respect, Germany is an inspiring country. After privatisations carried out in the 90's, over 50 municipal-level non-profit organisations were funded between 2007 and 2012. This allowed the creation of distribution networks, which handed back the energy control to municipalities.

The fact that municipalities hold the control and share sovereignty with social agents becomes a key to building an energy democracy and fighting against social poverty.

This energy must be sustainable and should be obtained from areas close to where it will be consumed. In this respect, a paradigm shift is needed. Moreover, energy crisis caused by a peak in oil production leads us to a major shift in energy management, production, distribution and consumption. Fostering the local administration of energy represents, on one hand, a strategic approach, and on the other, a basic element for climate change mitigation.

Therefore, this guide for municipalities approaches elements to be taken into account by these entities in an effort of rethinking how they can achieve a democratic control of energy and how to fight against energy poverty. These municipality policies by themselves will not be able to grant access to this essential right. Thus, they should go hand in hand with public administration from supra-entities. It is clearly seen is that the transition from a carbon-based economic model to a renewable-source and more efficient economic model should also involve a change from the capitalist economic model to another model that ensures public goods and a healthy environment.

Chapter 1

Healthful municipalities

In the current paradigm, it is clear that local existing trends affect people's health. There is a close correlation between environmental quality and people's health. Therefore, it is highly important to ensure the democratic control of energy and other common goods in order to understand that transformation of the environment plays a major role in creating a healthful municipality. This implies developing policies to heal air, reduce noises pollution, and improve environment, agriculture quality, as well as an urban planning that fosters healthful mobility and the prevention of activities that are damaging to health.



In order to encourage those initiatives from a municipal level, we provide a series of working guidelines that, when used appropriately, will also create employment opportunities.

Guideline 1.1. Routes to schools, workplaces and markets

Alongside the transformation of urban environments, routes to schools, workplaces and markets will be possible improving those routes if we create pleasant pedestrian easements.

Raising awareness among the population is essential. Healthy lifestyles can be promoted in schools, workplaces and Primary Health Care Centres.

The people moving by bike or foot result in health improvements to such people and to the environment.

You can find more information on the website of Respira del Centre per la Sostenibilitat project at the following link:

<https://mouteirespira.wordpress.com/lexposicio/>

Guideline 1.2. Decrease in ecological debt, also in energy production

A healthful municipality has clearly identified its ecological footprint in order to avoid jeopardising its future, as well as the planet we will leave to generations to come. Ecological debt is the level of resource consumption and waste generated by a population which excess of sustainable natural production. In terms of energy, Catalonia outsourced social and environmental issues to other regions in the world, and that needs to be reduced and adjusted.

The financial debt of municipalities is clear. Therefore, ecological debt must be included in annual budgets in order to implement

corrective measures in the short, medium and long terms that help in reducing the municipality's ecological footprint.

For relevant information regarding energy monopolisation (in Spanish):

<http://www.odg.cat/ca/publication/lacaparament-energetic-de-lestat-espanyol>

Guideline 1.3. Reduction of motor vehicles in fight urban areas

The pacification of a network of streets, blocks of flats, and districts/urban areas by means of a strict regulation of private vehicle circulation is essential for the municipality's health and it establishes a culture of street occupation, and by which looks for bringing back the kids games, walking-conversations and safeness.

Guideline 1.4. Promotion of food sovereignty

Food is a necessary asset in order to live in dignity. From municipalities, policies granting the right of access to land and natural resources will be created, so as to foster local and ecological production of its own. This makes possible to ensure that any inhabitant can feed themselves in a safe and healthy way with GM-free foods.

In order to achieve such sovereignty, it will be necessary to create municipal banks of lands, encourage regulations that foster craftworks, boost local product markets in the municipalities, districts, and streets, and make school canteens, hospitals and other organisations integrate ethical cooking. This implies a local, ecological, seasonal and environmentally-friendly kind of cuisine.


Guideline 1.5. Emancipation from extractive and industrial activities, and implementation of sustainable infrastructures

Certain extractive and industrial activities, as well as some infrastructures, are at odds with the creation of a healthy environment. Some of the examples are hydraulic fracturing, quarries or nuclear plants. Therefore, in order to ensure a healthy environment, the General Plan must take into account the fact that those activities are not favourable for the municipality.

Guideline 1.6. Enhancement of Natural Heritage as a health-generating public asset

Preserving natural heritage and making sustainable use of its positively impacts on people's and the municipality's health. It's becoming increasingly clear that well-preserved and well-managed non-urban public areas improve the health of those who visit and stroll on them.





Chapter 2

Citizen engagement and the creation of tools enabling the connection between democracy and energy management

Energy is a common and necessary asset for the well-being of people, and it cannot be outside citizen control. People and entities must determine how it should be managed beyond municipal governments and groupings of municipalities. This is

why it is essential that governments commit to a joint management of the energy used by the municipality by means of a real social engagement. Participation in decision-making regarding street lighting, public buildings, power companies, energy poverty, etc.

Guideline 2.1. Municipalities and groupings of municipalities

In the case of energy, participation can be managed from a municipal, district or supra-entity level. Such participation must be linked to self-sufficiency. No participation organs should be created if their decisions cannot be binding.

Guideline 2.2. Transparency in terms of energy

Information becomes a key to making stakeholders take part. It is essential to make information available to everyone in order for decisions to be made. This is why the city council website must include all the relevant information regarding energy (audits, budgets, consumption, decision-making activities, etc.) and make it accessible to all citizens.

Guideline 2.3. Citizen Council for Energy

Representatives from districts and entities, as well as people committed to a sustainable energy model, will create a Citizen Council in order to audit municipal energy management.

This Citizen Council will be responsible for the following tasks:

- Give advice to the city government or groupings of municipalities.
- Be knowledgeable on the matter and participate in the discussion of energy budgets and analyse the indicators of government energy management
- Take part in the accountability and strategies of municipal public companies having a stake in energy management within their goals.
- Bring the Council closer to the people and encourage mechanisms to engage them, as well as disseminate as widely as possible the agreements made by this body and the work it carries out.

Guideline 2.4. Economic and Social Panel on Energy

Create and promote an economic and social panel comprising business network and trade representatives, as well as from trade unions, social banking and credit unions.

The aim of this panel will be to analyse the economic strategy regarding energy and how to fund an energy transition in order to achieve a self-sufficient, fair and clean model for the municipality.

Guidelines 2.5. Environmental education programmes on energy

Education is essential in order to boost a critical way of thinking regarding energy and understand its boundaries with the world, climate change and the challenges of access to energy.

These environmental education programmes will be taught by means of resources and energy educators, who will become part of the educational projects of educational institutions. These programmes will also be promoted at workplaces, district councils and neighbourhood associations.

Chapter 3

Energy self-sufficiency in municipalities

Inherent limits must be also determined from the municipal level, and one of the most important ones is the energy limit. Therefore, more socially-responsible policies for a new energy culture must be created. We need to find a way of relating to our natural environment that takes into account the planet limits. In this case, an energy model overcoming the extraction paradigm and encouraging clean, renewable energies. We are fond of calling this Enkrateia, a Greek word that means temperance, as it is indeed a matter of somehow bringing enkrateia, which was praised by Socrates and Aristoteles,



from a personal ground to a socio-environmental perspective, thus transforming the self-control of the cautious individual into a civilizing self-containment.

Despite the fact the municipalities have not many competencies regarding energy, we can take advantage of all legal loopholes in order to move towards a citizen control in energy matters. Public control includes citizen engagement regarding power generation, network distribution and commercialisation.

It isn't a utopia. In some European cities, such as Munich, work is already being carried out in order to ensure that 100% of the

energy comes from clean sources by 2025. In Hamburg, power and gas services have been hand over to municipal governments. In the United Kingdom, the city of Nottingham has created a power distribution company, and in the United States over 48 million citizens in 2,000 cities receive power supply from local public companies or cooperative businesses.

Guideline 3.1. Public audit of the municipality's power distribution facilities

In order to achieve local self-sufficiency, it is necessary, in the first place, to determine the state of current facilities in order to analyse the chances for a new operating model. Therefore, an audit on the power distribution network facilities will be performed in order to determine not only its current legal (property systems) and physical state, as well as the cause of supply failures in terms of frequent power outages and micro-outages. This audit constitutes an essential tool for planning the future municipal management.

Guideline 3.2. Creation of a community power distributor

In order to comprehensively and thoroughly develop the municipal self-sufficiency community plan, it will be necessary to create a

public-owned company or cooperative business, which should be monitored by the Citizen Council for Energy.

This company will be responsible for power distribution through independent public lighting networks or direct power lines connected to generation facilities.

Taking into account the current legislation, it would be necessary to create one or several companies gathering all connected facilities under a single identity in order to make administrative procedures easier and make them comply with the current legislation.

Guideline 3.3. Creation of a municipal power operator.

Transition from a carbon-based economic model to an ecologically cleaner model must go hand in hand with a more democratic model. For this reason, public leadership from a municipal level is essential. By this reason it is essential to create a municipal power operator aiming to:

- Diagnose and plan the state of the municipality.
- Establish a savings and energy efficiency plan.
- Power generation from renewable sources.
- Ensure energy supply to everyone in the municipality.
- Education programmes and participation for a new energy culture.

Guideline 3.4. Promoting neighbourhood or district cooperatives for energy rehabilitation of buildings and implantation of renewable energy projects

The creation of neighbourhood or district cooperatives in order to carry out building rehabilitations or other kind of tasks on seeking sustainability must be an essential pillar in municipal management. These local cooperatives must bring democracy to the labour market and become a place of neighbourhood solidarity.

They can also specialise in solar energy implementation using the roofs of buildings or in other renewable energy generation projects.

In order to organise this neighbourhood cooperative, models of other cooperative businesses, such as Som Energia, can be emulated.

Guideline 3.5. Funding for self-sufficiency measures

There are several measures may be taken in order to fund municipal energy generation and rehabilitation projects. In this section, we will list some of these measures possibly to be implemented and have already worked for other municipalities:

- Credit unions, such as Coop57, that can be also created at a municipal level and invested in by the town hall.



- Neighbourhood microfunding in order to purchase a windmill, etc.
- Funding from energy savings in lighting, municipal buildings, etc.



Chapter 4

The fight against energy poverty

In the last few years, energy poverty has become a social emergency and a problem which must be tackled from all institutions. This issue must be solved in a fair manner so as to ensure that everyone has a dignified life.

The institutions closest to citizens are the municipalities. Therefore, they must be provided with tools so they can guarantee that everyone has the material conditions to be able to live with dignity.



Guideline 4.1. Link with power suppliers.

Power suppliers must take responsibility for energy poverty and thus act with social responsibility regarding this emergency; they are able to do so, since they benefit from high profit margins.

According to Law 24/2015 of 29 July on urgent measures to face the housing and energy poverty emergency, power suppliers must act with caution and be coordinated with social services:

“As a precautionary principle, a mandatory communication protocol with social services and an intervention protocol of such services must be established prior to the granting of the necessary aids to avoid power outages in case of payment defaults due to a lack of economic resources of needy families.”

Therefore, the goals of the power supplier will be to ensure access to these basic suppliers, prevent any outages and, in case they occur, to restore the service without any cost for low-income people. The Expenses associated to payment defaults or related to necessary

administrative procedures will be borne upon the supplier company and, therefore, ways to make this effective will be sought, as well as to restore the service on low-income people until the payment has been made.

Prominence should also be given to the municipality's role as a client of these supplier companies and, if necessary, this role should be questioned. When contracting the services, good practices of the supplier companies should be positively valued, such as a lack of power outages or the assumption of unpaid bills of families in economic disadvantages. The Bureau for Energy Poverty will be responsible for drafting the strategy, and it will also implement the necessary measures in order to tackle this social emergency while working on the document. The only public resources used will be those related to workers participating in the strategy's achievement.

Guideline 4.2. The Bureau of Energy Poverty

Creation of a permanent bureau (or transformation of pre-existing related bureaus, such as municipal or regional housing bureaus, consortium for social welfare...) within the town hall's structure, or in conjunction with other surrounding municipalities, in order to monitor and encourage a citizen rescue strategy to end energy poverty in the municipality within a period of less than a year.

The Bureau, under the Law 24/2015, will demand the supplier countries to send the data regarding power outages over the last few years, as well as their support proposals for the strategy, aiming to avoid public expenditure and indebtedness of people affected by this problem. The Bureau, aimed at ensuring the right of access to basic supplies for local people will be overseen by the Citizen Council for Energy, where institutions and people will take part. Presence of supplier companies will be required whenever it is deemed necessary.

Guideline 4.3. Training on energy poverty for municipal technicians.

Despite the fact that energy poverty is one of the issues that has been worsened by the economic crisis, it actually goes far back. Perhaps, cheap access to energy during the last decades has prevented the issue from emerging to its fullest. This is the reason why municipal workers whose daily task is to safeguard this right, should be provided with legal, technical, and sociological information, as well as alternatives so they can tackle energy poverty in the best possible manner.

Documentation of interest

Relevant information on energy poverty:

Spanish Energy Poverty Law:

http://consum.cat/consumidors_i_consumidores/tinformem/pobresaenergetica/index.html

Protocol on energy poverty:

http://consum.cat/doc/doc_26193407_1.pdf

Aliança Pobresa Energètica Website:

<http://pobresaenergetica.es/passos-seguir/>



European Municipalities against Fracking

Documentation regarding energy democracy at a municipal level:

One of the main and inspiring documents of this guide is the municipal energy proposal from Xarxa per a la Sobirania Energètica: <http://xse.cat/la-xse-presenta-una-proposta-energetica-municipalista/>

The CMES collective for an ecological and social transition
<http://cmescollective.org/>

The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation also has some documents. Among them, there is a very interesting document for the whole of Europe:

https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/sonst_publicationen/Energy-democracy-in-Europe.pdf

And another strategy for the democratic control of energy:

<http://www.rosalux.eu/publications/strategies-of-energy-democracy-a-report/>

Som Energia is also one of the inspiring elements to help achieve the social control of energy:

<https://www.somenergia.coop/ca/>

Transform Europe, a foundation of European left-wing foundations also presents a document in which Fundació Alternativa took part, which must be taken into account.

<http://www.transform-network.net/en/publications/publications-2016/news/detail/Publications/a-new-energy-to-change-europe.html>



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