

Application Form submitted by the initiatives to participate in the Transformative Cities People`s Choice Award

GENERAL INFORMATION	
Location:	Barcelona – Catalunya – Spain
Title of the Transformative Initiative:	Barcelona Energia - a metropolitan electricity operator
Name of organization:	Barcelona en Comú
Type of organization:	Barcelona en Comú is a citizen platform standing as a convergence candidacy, seeking the majority vote to win Barcelona and return it to its citizens.
Website:	https://barcelonaencomu.cat/
Category and Edition:	ENERGY. Transformative Cities Award 2 nd edition (2019).
STORYTELLING	
Summary	
<p>Barcelona Energía (BE) is the public renewable energy distributor that was set up with the aim of promoting local green energy generation, empowering citizens with regard to energy, and creating an alternative to the corporations in the electricity oligopoly.</p>	
Context and problem definition	
<p>The current energy model in cities, including Barcelona, has negative consequences for health, the environment, the people who live in the places where energy sources are extracted, and climate change. The model is hugely dependent on large energy corporations and infrastructure and imports of oil and nuclear fuel, which also means that it is economically inefficient. A determined strategy to save energy, promote renewable energies and democratize the system will help to reduce social and environmental impacts, the problems of energy poverty, and the city’s dependence on the corporations monopolizing its energy, as well as creating local jobs.</p>	

The proposal is to equip ourselves to increase public leadership and break free from the electricity oligopoly; to play an active role in the energy market; to be greener and fill the city with locally-produced renewable energy; to be more efficient; to facilitate self-sufficiency; to guarantee the right to energy and to involve citizens, placing them at the centre of decision-making and enabling them to play an active role.

Design and Initiation

A working group comprising the city council's municipal group of companies and the Barcelona en Comú green movement came up with the idea for the project.

Of course, it also benefited from the experience and track record of the movements for the right to energy and against energy poverty. These have shown how the energy oligopoly that dominates the country – Endesa, Gas Natural-Fenosa, Iberdrola, EON Spain and EDP – and the water company AGBAR, far from suffering from the crisis, have increased their profits and not hesitated to raise their tariffs: electricity has gone up by 83% since 2013 and water by 65% since 2008.

Apart from the working groups set up in 2015 to start to develop the idea, the City Council had already laid the foundations for it.

First, there is the Energy, Climate Change and Air Quality Plan for 2011-2020, drawn up by the Barcelona Energy Agency. This plan proposes ambitious, cross-cutting measures to follow through on the commitment Barcelona signed up to as part of the EU Covenant of Mayors, pledging to achieve a 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions associated with municipal activities by 2020.

Second, there is Barcelona's Climate Commitment, which was signed by 800 organisations, professional associations, guilds, unions, universities, schools and businesses linked to the More Sustainable Barcelona network and Barcelona City Council itself. The document was drafted in 2012 in a process that involved the organisations belonging to the network of signatories to the Citizen Commitment to Sustainability 2002-2012. It sets out ten objectives for a fairer, more prosperous and self-sufficient Barcelona – through the involvement, commitment and collaboration of the signatory organisations – and more than 100 lines of action.

Implementation

At first, the idea of creating a public company came up against legal difficulties due to the set of laws and restrictions established previously by the prevailing liberal model. Because of this, we turned to Tersa, a public company serving the Barcelona City Council and the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, to be the energy operator. The fact that this company belongs to the local authority implies that it is only allowed to devote 20% of its activities to third parties (in our case, citizens). With the current size of Tersa's business, this limits us to serving only about 20,000 families.

The City Council's relationship with the electricity corporations has likewise not been easy, and one of the aspects that proved most problematic was the energy contract. Endesa managed to get the tender for awarding this contract annulled. Endesa and Gas Natural disagreed with the tender specifications for the municipal contract, which included the obligation to tackle energy poverty. This led them to challenge the tender, and the Catalan Public Sector Contracts Court ended up agreeing with Endesa and annulling it. With the new energy operator, the City Council has ceased to depend on these corporations.

It was eventually possible to launch the project, which reflects the determination to play an active role in the electricity market and lead the transition to energy sovereignty in the metropolitan area.

As a public electricity distributor, its work includes the following activities:

- Purchase and supply electricity both to public buildings in the metropolitan area and to citizens (a total of 20,000 customers)
- Represent producers in the market for energy generated in the municipal photovoltaic power plants, the Waste-to-Energy Plant in Sant Adrià and the Garraf biogas plant.
- Market the surplus energy from domestic self-sufficiency systems
- Promote and encourage renewable energy generation in the metropolitan area.

It is also launching an "efficient" tariff that operates in segments, enabling increased energy savings, and a "solar" tariff that seeks to promote self-sufficiency. The surplus generated will be managed by Barcelona Energía and deducted from the bill.

Results achieved and Evaluation

Barcelona Energia is the largest 100% public electricity distributor in Spain. Cities like Cádiz, Pamplona and Palma de Mallorca are also opting for models similar to Barcelona's.

It is an instrument for promoting and encouraging local renewable energy generation (mostly solar power), both for municipal facilities and for Barcelona residents (self-generation for own use).

On 1 July, Barcelona Energia began supplying electricity to buildings and facilities belonging to Barcelona City Council and to 19 bodies and entities in the municipal companies group, providing the service to a total of 3,908 supply points.

In 2019, it also started to provide the service to facilities in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area and to citizens, up to a maximum of 20,000 homes.

The first assembly meeting of people who use Barcelona Energía services, the distributor's participation body, will be held on 23 March.

It markets certified renewable energy with a guarantee that it comes from 100% renewable sources, issued by the National Markets and Competition Commission (CNMC).

It is a public company promoting 100% public management of energy and working in coordination with the rest of the services in the city and the BMA.

It promotes local renewable energy generation with the aim of reducing energy losses associated with transport and ceasing to depend on the oligopoly in the electricity sector today.

It provides transparent information about where the energy it supplies comes from and the costs that make up the final price on its bills.

It promotes a culture of energy awareness among citizens to improve efficiency and increase saving.

It provides for participatory governance by establishing spaces such as the council of people who use Barcelona Energía services, in order to enable citizens to play an active role in decision-making about the energy distributor.

With its focus on the citizen, it works for the right to energy and to implement the Catalan Law on Energy Poverty (Law 24/2015).

Political Strategies

Fortunately, this project has enjoyed widespread social and political support. The main difficulties have been regulatory, both when setting up the company and when negotiating the obstacles energy-related regulations place in the way of any form of self-sufficiency, which faced many impediments in Spain until recently. As far as political strategies are concerned, we have various citizen associations in the energy distributor's participation body, the council of people who use Barcelona Energía services, in which we have aimed to include not just customers but also the city's wide range of citizen groups.

This council carries out its work through the "Decidim" web platform for participatory democracy. It is the advisory body that enables people who use Barcelona Energía services to participate actively in decision-making about the energy distributor. The roles of this council are to:

- Draw up proposals on the direction and priorities of Barcelona Energía.
- Participate in defining the awareness-raising and social education policy on the use of renewable energy and responsible energy use.
- Participate in drawing up proposals on tariffs and investments that the distributor should make in the required areas.

Related legislations

On 31 March 2017, a meeting of the full Barcelona City Council approved the creation of a public electricity distributor through the public company Tractament i Selecció de Residus, SA (TERSA), with the support of all the political groups except the PP, which abstained.

In the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (BMA), the initiative was approved in December 2018 with the support of all the groups. Since February 2018, Barcelona Energia manages the electricity market for all the energy generated by the city and the BMA, some 200 GWh/year.

Lessons learned

Standing up to oligopolies is of course not a simple task, but Barcelona Energia is one of the great triumphs of what we call a Brave Barcelona, which is facing up to corporate lobbies and achieving more autonomy and power for its citizens.

It is essential to have a solid social base and strong social movements that denounce the impunity enjoyed by these large corporations. This goes hand in hand with a negative perception of them in society, due to their practices, their lack of transparency, their unwillingness to apply measures to combat energy poverty, and their constant abuses and price rises.

At the moment, the energy distributor clearly suffers from constraints (in terms of the number of customers, procedures, etc), but it is highly valued as one of this administration's great successes.

EXTRA INFO

Supporting documents

<https://www.barcelonaenergia.cat/es/>

<http://energia.barcelona/es/>

<https://barcelonaencomu.cat/es>

https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/ecologiaurbana/sites/default/files/Presentacio_Sobirania_Energetica.pdf