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Call for Papers – PAD, Issue 26 (June 2024)

Humanizing Energy. Design and Art for Energy Transition

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Introduction

In a time of "polycrisis" (Tooze, 2021) such as the one we are currently experiencing, energy sustainability is considered a primary emergency, and one that even institutional actors are addressing, with culpable delays and with policies that often remain too extemporaneous; in this scenario, design and art represent strategic levers of action and innovation, to stimulate paradigm changes, to experiment new technologies and new conceptual-operational models and, in short, to explore more sustainable scenarios for the future.

In this vision, design disciplines intervene in the 'hard' components of the energy transition and its 'soft' and more relational and qualitative aspects. Such a dimension is 'close' to individuals and calls upon their personal responsibility without devolving solutions solely to institutions, companies, and international bodies. In such a scenario, the energy transition is instead based on the collective participation of all social entities, both formal and informal, and thus requires a sharing of themes, scales, and project intentions.

Community, care, technology, culture, identity, education, neighbourhood welfare, behavioural change, urban biodiversity, social and ecological networks, soft mobility, and urban resilience are some of the themes that should converge for a sustainable and inclusive energy transition.

The aim is to understand how the tools and skills of art and design can bring about innovations in meaning and provide new value, social and operational models, acting on a multiplicity of scales and spheres (e.g., domestic and urban space, product-services systems, communication campaigns, exhibition devices, architectural artefacts, installations, and public artworks, event design, etc.).

The call, therefore, intends to investigate - through projects, research, testimonies, experiments in progress, or anticipatory visions - the contribution that design and art can provide to support the energy transition, acting to change the everyday habitat towards the use of renewable sources, intelligent devices, community models for resource sharing, and technical as well as social infrastructures capable of responding to the challenge that awaits us.

Explanatory text of the call for abstract

Nowadays, the energy transition is an unavoidable challenge, an environmental, social, and economic necessity, and an urgency that can no longer be postponed. Among the international agreements about it, let us recall the recently fixed European Union goal of using 42.5% renewable energy in its energy mix by 2030 (REPowerEU Plan 2022), with parallel efforts to reduce consumption, improve the energy efficiency of buildings and production cycles, and invest in storage infrastructure.

The climate crisis is also impelling a reconsideration of the impact of fossil fuels on the environment and society. The transition to more sustainable sources, crucial for considerably reducing greenhouse gas emissions, represents a critical step in the fight against climate change. An advancement towards energy sustainability also goes in the direction of counteracting the emergency of energy poverty: while in developing countries such poverty manifests itself as the



inaccessibility to the electricity grid for about 1 billion people, in Italy in 2021 more than 2.1 million households were struggling to purchase a minimum set of energy goods and services (equal to 8.5% of the total number of households), and 10% of children to this day live in unhealthy, insufficiently heated and/or cooled, or poorly lit environments (OIPE Report 2023).

The energy transition does indeed encompass all aspects of social living: health, work, the quality of everyday spaces, mobility, up to and including cultural production, and the fight against inequality and discrimination. One of the priority aspects to be implemented is the dissemination of new systems of values to change behaviours and reduce energy consumption and demand. As a matter of fact, the transition requires systemic, structural, technological, political, and economic changes, as well as cultural changes, involving individuals, communities, and all local and global actors. It is, therefore, necessary to carry out a revolution of the present models starting from a more widespread energy education towards scenarios - in part already visible - of co-creation, co-production, and co-management of energy, of short and circular supply chains, self-production and digitized and smart processes for a safe, ethical and welcoming future. Innovative models such as those of renewable energy communities (Bolognesi, M., & Magnaghi, A. 2020), so-called circular neighbourhoods, and proximity energies aspire to engage individuals and businesses in the creation of a local energy system, re-establishing a direct relationship between users and production, creating new occupations, stimulating greater community cohesion and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In short, enhancing territorial specificities and promoting opportunities for social innovation and new forms of energy democracy (Liberti, 2022).

In this framework, design, with its interdisciplinary relations, particularly with the arts, is a potential ally for individual formation and collective education. It can help generate consensus, raise awareness, and broaden participation. It can outline new scenarios, define new formats, produce goods and services that motivate consumers to reduce their energy consumption, and it can embrace new sources of sustainable energy, exploring technologies and materials with a reduced environmental impact.

The call aims to gather reflections, studies, and work proposals to highlight the role of design and art in promoting systemic innovations in terms of meaning, culture, and society to provide new models of production, enjoyment, and consumption of sustainable energy. In particular, there is an interest in exploring themes such as:

- **The definition of new sustainability lexicons:** the energy transition is nowadays too often voiced with overly specialised technical-scientific languages and approaches, appearing substantially alien and scarcely comprehensible to common sense (Boffi et al., 2023). Would it be possible to define a new everyday energy vocabulary to 'domesticate' the transition by reducing the lack of basic knowledge around it and promoting a more divulgative tone of voice? Can a new shared, comprehensible language be nurtured to counter the 'energy illiteracy' that nowadays makes majorities appear disinterested in transition issues (Wilkinson and Lowe, 2021)? Could energy be designed by "humanizing" it, that is, approaching it with the combined contribution of technical disciplines and "humanities" (Boffi et al., 2023)?
- **The shift in the value system:** if this transition must occur primarily on a cultural level, what formative and informative strategies may be activated to work in this direction? With what tools and methods - multidisciplinary, scalable, innovative - might design and art



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promote awareness-raising actions to act on individual and collective sensitivity and enhance a culture of sustainability? How should urgencies and needs be brought to the surface while also developing new visions, promoting new creativity, and building social value? What role could designers play as cultural actors in the perspective of sustainable development?

- **The experimentation of new collaborative models:** the transition is a condition that requires particular resilience and proactivity both on the part of decision-makers-producers and of communities and individuals. Within this condition, processes are being experimented with to define new tools, practices, policies, and roles to promote alternative and innovative production, management, and consumption models, which are often characterized by participatory dynamics. If the transition is to take place, the first objectives are to promote the containment and reshaping of energy demand in everyday life and to guarantee energy accessibility for all. How could design and art foster increasingly inclusive, democratic, and conscious participatory processes? What are today's emerging forms of urban models, collective services, and product systems capable of guiding the transition?

Starting from these - and perhaps many other - questions, the call aims to collect contributions in the form of:

- **Essays and critical reflections** aimed at contributing to the knowledge on the state of the art of the contemporary debate, but also bringing dissonant points of view.
- **Field projects and experiments** aimed at investigating the role of design and art in defining a new productive, commercial, distributive, and conceptual paradigm.
- **Research and experimentation** bringing forward a visionary dimension, capable of delivering the most avant-garde solutions in terms of infrastructural, material, or process innovation.

Lines of theme development

- **New sustainability lexicons:** energy education, energy illiteracy, communication, education and information.
- **New value system:** sustainability ethics, behavioral change, new energy consumption and energy-saving models, preservation of diversity, intra-generational sustainability, cultural production.
- **New collaborative and participatory models:** experiences of co-creation, co-production, and co-management of energy, participatory forms of citizen awareness and engagement, resource sharing practices.
- **Energy proximity:** energy communities, circular districts, short supply chains, social and ecological networks, self-production models.
- **Technical and technological innovation:** infrastructural innovation, process, product or service innovation, smart devices, digitized practices and smart experiments to promote



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renewable sources, new eco-sustainable materials and new technologies with lower energy impact or greater efficiency.

- **Energy democracy:** new policies and forms of governance, community welfare, inclusivity, social cohesion, experiments in countering energy poverty, contrasting inequality.
- **New housing and urban models:** soft mobility, urban resilience, urban biodiversity, new habitats, place identity, supportive living.

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To participate to the call, we ask you to send:

Abstract proposals (from 2000 to 3000 characters, spaces included) in English by **29 February 2024**. If abstracts are accepted, full papers in English to submit for double-blind peer review by **8 April 2024**.

Full papers must have a minimum extension of 20.000 characters, including spaces and a maximum extension of 25.000 (abstract, footnotes and references excluded). All files should be prepared in an appropriate word processing package and saved as .doc, .docx file format (no .pdf).

The **final text** must comply with the indications provided in the document: "PAD-GUIDELINES-AUTHORS-ENG-2022" (<https://www.padjournal.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/PAD-GUIDELINES-AUTHORS-ENG-2022-1.docx>).

Authors have to submit a separate text file with the title of the paper, author/s name and surname, institutional affiliation, e-mail address, Orcid code and a short bio (maximum 1000 characters spaces included).

Illustrations (maximum 10 per article) must be collected in a .zip folder to be renamed by accompanying the author's surname and a progressive numbering corresponding to the captions (e.g. 01_Surname, 02_Surname). These should be listed in a document written in the same font as the main text and written on a Word .doc document as follows: "Figure 1: Author's name and surname, the title of the work, date". Minimum resolution of 300 dpi, .jpg file.

Abstract submission by e-mail to editors@padjournal.net

Timing

Launch of the Call: January 2024

Deadline Abstract: 29 February 2024

Full Paper: 8 April 2024

Double Peer Review: 8 May 2024

Publication: by the end of June 2024