

SomEnergia (which can be translated as “we are energy” or “I’m energy”) is Spain's first non-profit renewable energy cooperative. SE sells electricity to its members, competing with the ‘big’ energy companies, and is also a consumer cooperative for the production and supply of energy from renewable sources.

SE's goals are basically: to become a social movement changing the current Spanish energy oligopoly model (influenced only by oligopoly interests); to create a green energy demand (at the present moment the demand for green electricity is still in its infancy, there is currently an oversupply of certificates; selling green electricity does not carry an extra cost); to improve green energy generation; to attain zero balance between coop energy production and members' energy consumption.

To understand the beginnings of SE we need to focus on the political, economical and historical situation in Spain and the Spanish electrical market. Here's a brief overview:

- The electrical market was privatized from 1997 onwards (household market was privatized in 2003). Currently there is an oligopoly of 5 suppliers (Gesa-Endesa, E-ON, Iberdrola, Unión Fenosa, HidroCantábrico); distribution is private and is shared out between different actors depending on geographical location; transport belongs to a private firm (REE) with public shareholding; production is an open market but basically the only producers are the 5 oligopoly enterprises. The privatization process has been developed for private business profit.
- The Spanish electrical market has 22 million household contracts consuming 25% of total electricity distributed (CNE, 2012). The TUR tariff is the governmental tariff (stipulated by law) offered only by the 5 big suppliers. Prices are weighted throughout Spain.
- Electrical production in mainland Spain is: 22.1% nuclear, 19.3% coal, 14.1% combined cycle, 12.7% co-generated, 7.6% hydroelectric, 18.2% wind generated, 4.3% solar, 1.8% from other renewable sources.
- Between 2004 and 2012 electricity from renewable sources was promoted by the Spanish government by feed in tariff implementation reaching 31.886 MW power installed, 68.710 GWh energy annual generation (REE, 2013) and the creation of 40.000 jobs in green energy technology. At the beginning of 2012, the Spanish government froze all FIT to new renewable energy production projects. This means that if SomEnergia had started out only as a production cooperative (like the large majority of UK cooperatives) the project would be on hold right now. Fortunately SE has a bigger social goal, another business line (selling electricity) and the possibility to invest in energy saving and heat production projects which do not require subsidies. Recent additional retro-active measures are a new 7% production tax on energy. Fossil and nuclear will simply transfer this tax to the market, renewables can't do this, because their feed in tariff is fixed.
- The Spanish energy system has a minimum purchase of 100 kWh in the daily market and 1000 kWh in the future market. For smaller players this can be a problem since, especially at the beginning, the minimum is often not attained and, therefore zero must be entered as the purchasing forecast for that particular time of the day. Later on they are punished for this bad ‘prediction’ as all customer consumption at that time is invoiced at ‘deviation’ cost price. Another problem is that the final cost of the kWh purchased is not known roughly 9 months afterwards.

SomEnergia started in December 2010 as a small initiative focused around people at the University of Girona but soon spread towards Barcelona and the rest of Catalonia. Catalonia is one of the 19 Spanish autonomous regions with its own local (official) language-culture and has, historically, a very strong cooperative movement and industrial background. Catalonia has 10 million inhabitants and its limits are France, the Mediterranean and the regions of Valencia and Aragon.

The SE production/consumption model was based on already well developed and successfully functioning RES coops in northern European countries such as Belgium (Ecopower) and Germany (EWS, Greenpeace Energy). The Coop model permits total transparency without a pyramid structure and is a very well known model in the region.

Investment in production energy projects is selected by a general criteria statement, decided

by General Assembly. Technical expertise is developed in technical development working groups run by volunteers/technicians. At the present moment there are 5 technical working groups where the technical details of wind, solar, biogas, biomass and PV self-consumption are being considered and where the activity within or development of the electricity market is being discussed.

The current general criteria are: low/zero environmental impacts, local and distributed energy production, alliances with local administration, the participation of local citizens in projects, the creation of local jobs, first and second sectors project implication; the use of well known technologies. This involves the installation of solar photovoltaic panels from 10 to 300 kW in buildings; the installation of mini windmill farms, with 3-4 wind generators of max 2,5 MW; the co-generation of 500 kW together with biogas plants; biomass heating; mini hydraulics through the recuperation of fresh water from natural falls; the installation of PV self-consumption facilities. All these actions aim to achieve electrical sovereignty and decentralization of production.

Everybody invests within the cooperative: normal bank finance is not available anymore in Spain. Nobody finances anything anymore. This did not hinder SomEnergia. The SE financing model is based on direct investments by its members. As a result it's not affected by the crisis. Even more so since trust in the banks has decreased enormously over the last few years and people seem to be more open to alternatives.

To become a member requires a deposit of 100 Euros into the cooperative's social capital. After 35 months of official activity, SomEnergia now has more than 9,600 members – meaning a total of 960,000 Euro in social capital. This continues to grow as every month around 500 new members sign up.

This financial stability together with the SE financing model has had the consequence that other private project developers have offered SE their projects with the feed-in tariff already assigned, because they could not get credit facilities. This has saved SomEnergia two to three years of development time. All members share the results. SomEnergia cooperative is 100% owner of three limited companies. All projects are developed within these companies. A first project (100 kW solar panels on an industrial building) was bought in 2012 and has been producing for almost one year now. Eight more solar projects are producing totaling around 700kW. A 500 kW biogas project is already starting production. Investment in this project stands at 2,200,000 Euro. This is the first cooperatively owned biogas project in Spain. Total investments this year will amount to around 3.5 million Euro. SomEnergia will produce electricity for about 1400 average customers.

As a non-profit cooperative SomEnergia started selling green energy from existing sources in October 2011. It is electricity bought from the market and sold to the coop members. This renewable claim is certified via a government supervised system of certificates of origin.

SomEnergia work is web based. Currently there are 7 people working, three full-time and four part-time, in the small (90 m<sup>2</sup>) and functional office in Girona Technological Park. There are six computers, a database somewhere in 'The Cloud' and lots of enthusiastic members who are coop ambassadors in their regions.

More than 1000 coop's members have joined "Plataforma", the cooperative on line round table (<http://plataforma.somenergia.coop/>) and they are organized either in working groups working or local groups.

SomEnergia does not advertise, does not send paper invoices, membership certificates, etc. to members. SE has no company cars and pays normal salaries.

The first year SE worked with volunteers only. Most people participated part-time but also SE had a few full-time volunteers while they were unemployed. SomEnergia actively uses Facebook and Twitter (each of them run by a volunteer member) which makes it easy to reach a large public and new groups of people.

SomEnergia is managed by a board composed of 7 elected members (elected by the members of the cooperative in general assembly) in charge for 4 years. There are also two different tools that give SE working basis: the statutes of the cooperative and the internal work rules. Periodically changes are discussed and approved in the general assembly. Participation in the General Assembly can be done personally or by streaming. SE has a resilient structure and at

the present moment some organizational changes are being contemplated so as not to lose democracy because of the fast increase in membership, currently 120 per week.

SomEnergia expansion throughout Spain is carried out by volunteers throughout the country. It started as a group of people in Girona, open to the whole of the country, but uncertain if they would be supported outside their direct communities. Right from the beginning, citizens from all around the country started to get involved. Currently 9% of the members are from Girona, 62% from the rest of Catalonia (mainly from Barcelona) and the 38% from all around Spain. Spontaneously local support groups have sprung up, by now 50. These are groups of volunteers who actively promote the cooperative in their community by organizing town meetings, by participating in (environmental) fairs, by communicating with local newspapers, etc. etc. Local support groups organize regular workshops for members on issues concerning energy.

SomEnergia web page: [www.somenergia.coop](http://www.somenergia.coop)