

Title:

Author:

Occupy Climate Change (OCC!) *City initiative entry*



FORMAS



BARCELONA COMMITS TO CLIMATE BREAKDOWN

The city's Climate Plan and Declaration of Climate Emergency

Vittorio Giordano

**AIXÒ NO ÉS UN
SIMULACRE**
DECLARACIÓ D'EMERGÈNCIA CLIMÀTICA

'This is not a drill – Climate emergency declaration'. Frame from the video 'This is not a drill' –

author: Barcelona City Council. Licence CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 ES.

➤ **Location:**

Barcelona, Catalunya, Spain

➤ **Promoters:**

In 2015 the network ‘for a more sustainable Barcelona’, with the citizen-led initiative ‘Barcelona’s Commitment to Climate Change’¹, promoted the drafting of a comprehensive initiative to face the climate breakdown. The process of development was driven by the Citizen Council for Sustainability, with an open, participatory process. The document was coproduced with the City Council and the network ‘for a more sustainable Barcelona’, while members of the public also contributed through the online platform Decidim.

The Climate Plan was approved on 26 October 2018.

On 15 January 2020, the city of Barcelona declared the climate emergency to step up the actions developed in the climate plan. The content of the declaration was produced by the Climate Emergency Committee, together with the City Council, the Citizen Council for Sustainability, and many citizens from different organizations.



Video: ‘This is not a drill – Climate emergency declaration’ – author: Barcelona City Council – available at: <https://www.barcelona.cat/emergenciadclimatica/en/this-is-not-a-drill> (Licence CC

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➤ **Beneficiaries:**

The plan claims to prioritize people and their well-being, it acknowledges the unequal vulnerability and distribution of hazards across the population and the fact the most vulnerable subjects are expected to increase due to climate change. The climate justice perspective adopted puts such people at the centre of the initiative and make them the first beneficiaries by addressing their socio-economic situation in order to improve life standards in the face of the climate crisis. The plan guarantees energy rights for all, preventing cuts of supplies. It recognizes the right to decent housing and sets subsidies and grants for house renovation, it strengthens the care services for vulnerable people and helps providing employment. In addition, clean air, green public spaces, shadow shelters, access to water, improved mobility services and a more resilient city to hazards such as floods, heat waves, droughts or fires will be beneficial for every citizen. Biodiversity in the city will benefit as well from the expansion green areas and corridors.

➤ **Engagement with climate change:**

The initiative is built around for pillars:

- **Mitigation:** to reduce the city's contribution to climate change by abating greenhouse gas emissions and change the current unsustainable way of consumption.
- **Adaptation and resilience:** to diminish the city's vulnerability to climate change, making it more resilient and prepared to face its effects, by taking care of people, environment, and water resources.
- **Climate Justice:** the more vulnerable are put at the centre of the initiative actions by addressing the unequal distribution of negative impacts between districts, generations, classes, and genders.
- **Collective Action:** to include individual citizens and social bodies by creating a space of expression and contribution to the plan both in the decision and in the implementation phase.

➤ **Values:**

As it can be read in the Climate Plan, the values of the initiative focus on a sustainable city, which is envisaged to be:

- **Healthy:** promoting active living, clean air, quality public spaces and green areas, people's health, and well-being.

- Socially fair: the social, economic, gender, territorial and cultural diversity of its citizens is to be considered in any future change.
- Safe and Habitable: the spaces of everyday life must be comfortable, friendly, safe for everyone to foster social cohesion.
- Low-carbon and distributive: energy production, services and consumption are not dependent anymore on fossil fuels, economic benefits are distributed fairly.
- Efficient and renewable: mobility must become sustainable; resources must be used circularly.
- Participative: encouraging participation with spaces where people can express opinions and contribute; information and knowledge are spread widely across the city.

The Emergency Declaration shifts the focus to the urgency and complexity of the challenge to face. It advocates for an ambitious and drastic rethinking of every aspect of the city and of the production-consumption system to transform an unsustainable and unfair economic model. It emphasizes values such as *‘shared care work and fraternal or sisterly relations with other human beings, other living beings and ecosystems, in private, public and community spaces.’*². The city is recognized as a major contributor to the crises, but also as a place where big opportunities to face it rise.

Climate justice is the fundamental perspective of the initiative. It acknowledges that the vulnerability to climate change is not equally spread across the city, but it follows age, gender and income disparities which are correlated with higher energy and food poverty, lower life expectancy and health results. Given that social inequalities are enhanced by climate emergency, the call for more effort is addressed towards those more responsible for the crises, in order not to burden those who already suffer from the unfair distribution of negative impacts.

Finally, the declaration asks to other cities, states and every economic sector to be more ambitious in the targets set, it invites to form alliances and it demands for political coherence, while keeping at its centre the inclusion of city residents through processes of co-production.



City Hall facade illuminated in green with the slogan "Walk, pedal, bus, subway towards the city we want" Author: Clara Soler Chopo. License CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

➤ **Objectives:**

The Climate Plan establishes measures to achieve the following targets by 2030:

- Reduce the levels of CO₂ emissions per capita by 45% compared to those of 2005.
- Increase the urban green space by 1.6 km².
- Achieve a domestic consumption rate of potable water lower than 100 litres per resident, per day.
- Obtain 100% clean funding.
- Reduce energy poverty to zero.
- Promote collaborative citizen projects by allocating €1.2 millions in subsidies.

In addition, Barcelona intends to become carbon neutral by 2050.

The climate emergency declaration steps up the action by setting a more ambitious target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 50%, compared to the levels of 1992, by 2030. Accordingly, the initiative proposes seven model changes:

- Change of urban model: increment of the urban green space throughout the city, more efficient buildings, a transformation of public space for social use, a development of sustainable and collective modes of mobility and the avoidance of biodiversity loss.
- Change of mobility and infrastructure model: it embraces a reduction of GHG emissions from the whole sector of transports, an improvement of traffic conditions and public transport, more space for pedestrians, a limitation of private vehicles and a more rational use of port and airport infrastructures.
- Change of energy model: it will require a rational and efficient use of energy, an enhancement of self-generation and self/shared consumption, more investment to replace fossil fuels and nuclear power plants with renewable energies.
- Change of economic model: to a digital and circular one, which is fairer, more sustainable, capable of generating better quality employment without fostering inequalities. Incentives, climate taxation, accounting for environmental costs and making tourism more sustainable are among the actions considered.
- Change of consumption and waste model: to one based on needs. Here the target is reaching zero waste, by using materials in loops and promoting a different consumption culture.
- Change of food model: into a sustainable and local one, which supports ecological food products, farmers, urban and peri-urban agriculture, while structurally reducing food waste. Fundamental will be improving the accessibility to food and promoting a dietary change.
- Change of cultural and educational model: this involves education on all levels, cultural activities, involvement and cooperation between citizens, organizations, municipal bodies, promotion of climate actions and empowerment of young people.

Each of these has specific lines of action that can be found in the respective document^{2,3}.

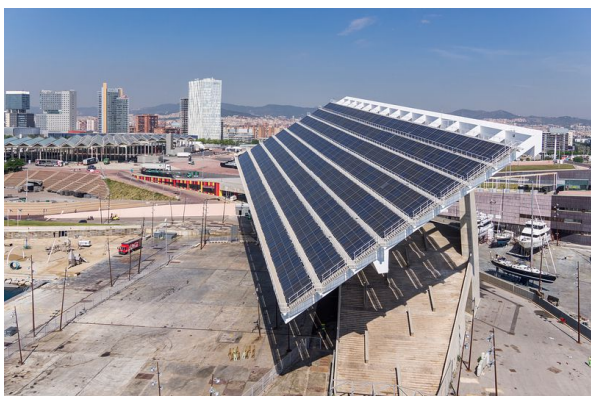
➤ **Timeline:**

The climate plan was established in 2018 and the climate emergency declaration became effective in 2020. They both set targets for 2030 on the path for Barcelona to become carbon neutral by 2050.

➤ Visible Effects:

Since the approval of the initiative, a series of actions have been developed by the City Council and residents, among these:

- Travelling exhibition ‘Barcelona responds to the climate emergency’⁴
- Refuge Schools: it contains measures such as building water points, spaces for shade and vegetation and improving insulation of buildings, to be applied in schools.
- Climate Emergency Marathon: Focused on minimizing water and energy consumption and waste production in specific buildings.
- Green Rooftops: it promotes vegetation-covered rooftops.
- Farmers Markets: aimed to create spaces for the direct sale of seasonal, fresh, local products.
- Environmental Classrooms: spaces that offer information and education, organize visits and workshops, promote environmental and sustainability culture.
- Energy Advice Points: they offer information on how to reduce energy consumption.
- Superblocks programme⁵
- Low Emissions Zone⁶: area where restrictions on the most polluting vehicles are applied.
- Women and Climate⁷



Forum Photovoltaic panel - Author: AL PHT Air Picture TAVISIA. Can Cadena Urban Garden - Author: Equip Audiovisuals. Licence: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Monitoring measures are applied to see the progresses towards each target. Unfortunately, the results have been updated before 2018, when the plan was not drafted yet. The only available are:

- 100% of funding requested in 2018 is clean, as the target set.
- €200.000 allocated in subsidies for 11 citizen projects in 2018, plus €200,000 allocated for a new call for applications in 2020. (The target is €1.2 million by 2030).

(A special Climate Emergency Monitoring report from July 2020 is available only in Catalan⁸).

➤ **Actors involved:**

The main body involved is the City Council: its composition and members can be found at: <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/en/municipal-organisation/>

The ‘Ecology, Urban planning, Infrastructure and Mobility’ area of the City Council, which organisation chart can be accessed here: <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/ecologiaurbana/en/about-us/organisation-chart#>

The main bodies involved are the Network ‘For a More Sustainable Barcelona’ and the Citizen Council for Sustainability. The first includes many organizations such as schools, universities, citizens and professionals associations, companies and businesses; the City Council is also a member.

The second is a consultative and participatory city body working on sustainability-related projects, its members can be found at: <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/ecologiaurbana/en/bodies-involved/citizen-council-for-sustainability/members>

Citizen are active participants as well.

➤ **Limits:**

By being partly a municipal initiative, it is subject to institutional limits. New priorities could move it to background (e.g. the pandemic), or political conflicts and power relations could affect the process. To give an example, in 2019 the Spanish Constitutional Court ruled that the Climate law set by the Government of Catalonia, in 2017, was unconstitutional. It declared that Catalonia does not have the power to project the energy transition or to set emission reduction targets, it overturned the ban on fracking and opposed the goal to close nuclear power plants.

In addition, the initiative could be opposed by who may see such changes as economically inconvenient, such as companies working in the sectors of tourism, agribusiness, real estate, vehicles, flights or fossil fuels. Lobbying action could limit, slow down or even stop the process as such entities are powerful and very influential on economy and politics.

➤ **Critical Points:**

The project is at its early stages so there are no visible shortcomings yet. Critical points can arise from the actions projected, even though it is not clear how these will be implemented. If not planned appropriately with a systemic view, they could simply lead to burden shifting and externalization of hazards, instead of an effective change. Processes as gentrification and green fixes could also occur, producing exclusion and marginalisation. Such a profound transition will affect the entire society, it could face popular opposition and it could foster inequalities. The focus on people and the climate justice perspective adopted, however, could be effective in preventing such outcomes.

Furthermore, resources will be needed to achieve such transformation, and this could even lead to increasing consumption and emissions in the early stages of the process.

➤ **Replicability**

Every municipality, city, region, or state can adopt plans like Barcelona's. Even if this is already happening on different scales, a lot more can be done. The process is even slower for Emergency Declarations since these implicate profound commitment to the cause.

➤ **Is this initiative conducive to broader changes?**

The initiative modifies institutional arrangements, urban and social paradigms. Some of the actions includes aims to change existing laws or write new ones to reach the targets set.

➤ **Materials:**

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3. Area of Urban Ecology. Barcelona City Council, (2018), *Climate Plan 2018-2030*, Available at: https://www.barcelona.cat/barcelona-pel-clima/sites/default/files/documents/climate_plan_maig.pdf , [last accessed date: 16 October 2020].
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