

## Call for papers *Journal of Energy History* / *Revue d'histoire de l'énergie*

### *English version*

### **Crises, catastrophes et désescalade énergétique/ Crises, disasters and energy de-escalation**

#### **Special issue coordination**

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#### **Provisional timetable**

- abstracts submission (1 page) 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024
- articles selection by 15 March 2024
- first draft of the article to be sent by 1<sup>st</sup> June 2024
- publication by 1<sup>st</sup> Décembre 2024

This issue of the *Journal of Energy History* aims to explore the way in which crises and disasters reshape our relationship with energy, and how they may or may not lead societies towards an energy de-escalation. By de-escalation, we mean a rapid and brutal transition towards low-power energy systems and towards consumption and productions modes focused on greater sobriety. Crises and disasters generates disruptions or catastrophes that prevent energy to be immediately available and where energy flows are obstructed. Societies may then turn to low-tech solutions and alternative energy systems compared to the previously dominant ones. What energy solutions then prove possible to maintain daily life? What is the future of energy networks? What are the constraints and new possibilities that arise when dealing with less energy?

This special issue aims to reflect on the dynamics of energy de-escalation under constraints. The occurrence of a natural disaster (storm, cyclone, earthquake, flood, etc.), the onset of a political crisis or the outbreak of a geopolitical conflict can disrupt the energy supply of affected territories, through network breakdowns, social system disorganization, or even energy production itself, in the case of a shutdown of power plants. Certain economic events, such as the oil shock of the 1970s, also affect large-scale energy balances. The contemporary environmental crisis, and the questions it raises about what would be a necessary *energy transition* with contours that are difficult to define, questions the survival of energy systems characterized by abundance and immediate resource availability.

The notion of crisis is thus understood in its acute forms, such as the immediacy related to a storm, for example, but also in its more structural and long-term forms, like the contemporary climate crisis. The combination of these forms, when the crisis appears to be occasional but is only a symptom of a broader crisis, is also a relevant line of analysis for the approach proposed here.

By looking at crises in their multidimensional aspects (political, economic, social and environmental), the goal is to analyze the nature and consequences of the energy upheavals they generate. Crises have more or less long-term temporalities (a sudden and brief natural disaster, a protracted political conflict), thus constraining energy systems to varying degrees in the long term. The crisis can also extend, through interdependence mechanisms, to other infrastructures (drinking water, internet networks, the cold chain, etc.). How, then, to adapt to energy collapse?

Crises present contrasting pictures of de-escalation: the breakdown of energy networks is more or less abrupt, the extent of destruction more or less significant, and the collapse of energy systems more or less marked. Facing the crisis involves reflecting on the needs of populations and social groups: how do we articulate de-escalation dynamics with social needs? Social hierarchies make populations unevenly vulnerable to the crisis. The use of emergency energy solutions, such as the proliferation of individual generators for social groups that can afford them in crisis-ridden countries today, does not necessarily project societies towards a frugal and decarbonized future. Conversely, the crisis can sometimes be an opportunity for the formulation of political discourses of renewal, projecting towards alternative energy production systems, without these discourses necessarily materializing. After a crisis, episodes of demographic decline or weakened mobility can lead to lasting changes in energy production.

After the crisis and the immediate management of emergencies, the question arises of how the dynamic of energy recomposition is anchored in the long term. Is it or is it not a question of going beyond de-escalation, that is only conceived as reactive to the crisis? Does a discourse of energy planning emerge in the post-crisis period? How does a chosen de-escalation dynamic, with lasting effects on energy demand, potentially begin? On the contrary, after the crisis, people may legitimately want to return to previous energy consumption standards, raising questions about the social appropriation of the idea of energy de-escalation and the dynamics of changing needs. Do crises bring about new standards of energy comfort? To what extent do they redefine the concept of energy precariousness?

Energy networks will also be examined. How do crises affect networks? How can we manage their gradual return to service, and with what constraints? On which actors does the restoration of networks rely and with what difficulties? Is the crisis an opportunity to reconsider the centralization of networks and promote decentralized forms of networks? Or, on the contrary, to accentuate centralization? The link between the evolution of energy demand in times of crisis and network design will then be questioned.

The proposed papers can draw on various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. The use of geography, for example, could question territorial dynamics of energy de-escalation facing crises and disasters. Other approaches, such as sociology, urban planning or political science, can also contribute to question the theme of this issue. However, while the historical approach is not the only one solicited by this call of papers, the journal encourages all respondents to situate their reflection in time, examining continuities, changes and mutations, over the long or short term. The call for papers is open to any territorial context, without restriction to the French or Western framework.

Papers can also address more methodological issues, especially regarding access to statistical sources in times of crisis. How to produce reliable energy balances? Can we have a

quantified idea of the de-escalation process when national statistical sources are deficient, when informal exchanges and smuggling movements are structured to overcome the energy crisis? What access to sources and fieldwork do we have to observe de-escalation as directly as possible, in a social context made more complex by the crisis?

The topic of this special issue takes inspiration from a conference organized in July 2023, grouping researchers coming from different disciplines and horizons to question *energy de-escalation*. A podcast summarizing the contribution is accessible online<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.pca-stream.com/fr/player/desescalade-energetique-178?utm\\_source=STREAM+VOICES&utm\\_campaign=78156d3629-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2023\\_12\\_15\\_02\\_30&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_-78156d3629-%5BLIST\\_EMAIL\\_ID%5D&mc\\_cid=78156d3629&mc\\_eid=a4e44061a6](https://www.pca-stream.com/fr/player/desescalade-energetique-178?utm_source=STREAM+VOICES&utm_campaign=78156d3629-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2023_12_15_02_30&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-78156d3629-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D&mc_cid=78156d3629&mc_eid=a4e44061a6)