

PAPERWORK OF ENERGY

JUSSI PARIKKA AND SAMIR BHOWMK

Image source: "Amendment on the Regulation of Energy Performance in Buildings", TC Resmi Gazete [Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey], no.27539 (April 2010).

An Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) is a straightforward document. It "includes information on the minimum energy requirement and energy consumption classification, insulation properties and efficiency of heating and/or cooling systems of a building. The EPC aims to use energy and energy resources effectively and efficiently, prevent waste of energy and protect the environment."1

One can also consider the EPC as an interface and representation of the operations of energy in contemporary architecture and urbanism. Furthermore, while the EPC might come across as an official document for the authentication of energy consumption, it undeniably becomes a method of abstraction and concealment, as a delay of measures, and as a representation of an undefinable value.

In such an abstraction, energy stays distanced from the infrastructures of production and transmission. Although offered as a measure, the EPC effectively conceals the geophysical and planetary-scale impact of diverse forms of energy as they become incorporated into our homes and cities. As such, the original act of fire and combustion channeled as energy for architecture is also re-enacted through our digital devices, remaining buried under layers of infrastructural data concealed from the public imagination.

Consequently, the EPC could be regarded as a delayed measure. Million-year old fossils are burned up for electrical flow, while the impact of consumption takes place after the fact. The standard unit of measurement—the kilo Watt hour (kWh)—lingers on as a remainder, a hubris of the past, a mix of load factor, and economics deeply entrenched in monopolies and institutions. Thus, as a device and measure of value, the EPC doubles as an interface not only for architecture and energy infrastructure, but also for the financial mechanisms that determine value patterns of urbanization. In the end, in contemporary operations of capitalism, the work of standards is to standardize sustainability as the sustainability of property and valuation. What would an EPC document look like if its energy measure was not a delayed one?

About the author

Samir Bhowmik is a Helsinki-based multidisciplinary artist. He received a Doctorate of Arts from Aalto University, Finland, and a Master's of Architecture from the University of Maryland, United States. His current project "Imaginary Natures: Extractive Media & the Cultural Memory of Environmental Change" examines media cultures of extraction through artistic practices.

Jussi Parikka is Professor at Winchester School of Art, UK and Visiting Professor at the Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. He also teaches as part of Strelka's Terraforming program in Moscow and writes books such as A Geology of Media (2015).