



ASPO VII - final thoughts

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The first ASPO conference I attended was in 2006, in Pisa, where it was hosted by Ugo Bardi. While I was there, I had the good fortune to meet Dennis Meadows, a man whose work I have known since I was very young, but which now has much more relevance than I first imagined. During his address, he told us an important thing: As events start unfolding and a general awareness of depletion arises, ASPO will lose its *raison d'être*.



I enjoyed my time at Barcelona, visiting a wonderful set of people in a fascinating city. As I wrote earlier, the city itself is a living lesson on urban planning, very walkable and cyclable, with good public transport and uniform buildings. Other than the main traffic avenues (that have two or three lanes each way plus pedestrian and cycling paths), all of the streets are one way--a small detail that makes life so much easier (and safer) for pedestrians and cyclists. The old Gothic quarters of the city are not laid in the same ruler and triangle fashion, but are comprised of many narrow streets where cars are useless--pedestrians rule, bicycles and scooters abound.

I had little time for tourism. I couldn't go visit [Gaudi's](#) works, only the eternally under construction Sacred Family Cathedral, but Sunday afternoon Chris and I went for a walk and got a good feeling of the city. Everywhere you go, especially in the old city, there's something happening--people shopping, dancing, acting, and street musicians in every corner (jazz, folk, classical, the whole lot). Barcelona is a city alight with life, where people enjoy being outside.

Just a small example of this cosmopolitanism: we eventually ended up at a park where there was warm sunshine between passing clouds. At the park, there were many people jogging; many children playing. At a corner of the park, there was an elevated bandstand, crammed with people dancing to a stereo. The majority were in their twenties, but there were people of other ages, also. Such spontaneity would never happen back home, I said to Chris. And the funniest part about it was that they were dancing to American music: Swing.



But back to the conference itself. When the TOD crew got together Saturday evening, we could already sense that this time it would be somewhat different. Unfortunately, many of the national ASPO branches could not be present, mostly for financial reasons. Without people like Bruce Robinson, Jorg Schindler, Herman Zittel or Klaus Illum, an ASPO conference is not exactly the same. None of our friends from ASPO-China or ASPO-Japan could make it either.

When I arrived at the speakers reception and complimented Daniel Gómez, one of the organizers, he told me something similar: “Bienvenido al ASPO de los resistentes”--*Welcome to the ASPO conference of the resistance*. This was indeed not a favourable time to host a conference on fossil fuel depletion, after a 50% decline in oil prices, with global economic recession at the door step.

ASPO found itself at a crossroads: While not everyone accepts that a peak in world oil production is here now, the general public takes cheap oil as something of the past. More than that, the economic difficulties envisioned as following constraints in oil production growth are here. ASPO must somehow evolve in order to keep a relevant role in Society. And this goes for most of the peak oil awareness movement too. The time is here to move beyond Oil.

Bob Lloyd put the situation in more explicit terms during the speakers reception, “We are facing the first impacts of the problem. A period of time is beginning when Society will be receptive to and will listen for a solution, but this period of time may be very short”. The problem is that there is no “Solution” for the depletion of Fossil Fuels, and ASPO was never was an organization of answers, but of questions. Moreover, it is likely that the problem must be addressed beyond the physical solutions.

But ASPO can be a catalyst, not for a “Solution,” but for new policy strategies and tactics that may help us fare better through the transition away from Fossil Fuels. Facing depletion is not yet at the heart of the political agenda, at every level, from international relations to state executive programs to daily family life. And although energy is becoming a concern for many policy makers, net energy is still pretty not understood, when it should be the lighthouse guiding us through the storm.

While this sort of quasi-academic conference is very fruitful for those of us who take part in it, it may not be now the best way to impact the political agenda. When ASPO started, it made sense to

hold an event like this, building the network of scientists, researchers and concerned citizens who are now the fabric of the Association. But now ASPO (and the peak oil movement in general) need to start reaching out directly and frequently to politicians and industry. Some national branches have been able to do this at a regional level, but at the international, even pan-European or pan-American level, it is yet to happen.

I can't exactly say how this new step for ASPO should be taken. It may be by trying other forms of events, perhaps by focusing more on what's beyond Oil and beyond Growth. Above all, I feel that ASPO somehow needs to start offering more hope and less gloom. Maybe that way it can find its optimal role for the future.

See you next year,

Luís de Sousa

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[ASPO VII - first day](#)

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