Bridge-Building in the U.S. Energy Transition Movement: Navigating Social and Geographic Divides in a Contentious Environment

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Bridge-Building in the U.S. Energy Transition Movement: Navigating Social and Geographic Divides in a Contentious Environment

In this dissertation I examine how the energy transition movement navigates and prioritizes bridge-building across social, cultural and geographic divides. Capital benefits from division that inhibits bridge-building and collective action, so I follow capital and power as a thread running throughout. The outcome is a constructive critique of the energy transition movement from a critical sociological perspective.

I address the following research questions: 1) How do energy transition movement organizations navigate bridge-building? 2) How can bridge-building across the energy system's vast social and geographic divides be made more feasible? How can social theory inform such a task?

In Chapter II I examine how participation in the policymaking process can inhibit bridge-building activities. I describe four thematic clusters of important bridging activities and identify three facets of the policy process that can inhibit these activities – the policy process' timing and cadence, its often binary nature, and the ways in which it is technical and professionalized.

In Chapter III I examine how and why organizations prioritize social and geographical bridging work. Findings suggest that most organizations work either across social or geographic distance but not both simultaneously, while a few manage to do so. These findings reveal a tension between bridging work that is needed to optimize movement breadth and success, and the bridging work that is occurring. They suggest the importance of studying bridging in a social movement across both social and physical space.

In Chapter IV I draw from experiences conducting participant-observation in communities in Oregon and Montana, accompanied by in-depth interviews, to 1) identify differences in cultural norms and framing between the two sites; 2) identify similarities in structural position; and 3) explore opportunities for frame alignment and solidarity.

Together, insights developed in these chapters contribute to theoretical understanding of bridge-building processes and prioritization. They also underscore the importance of bridge-building in addressing the interrelated crises of ecology and polarization in civil society.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

CJA: Climate Justice Alliance

CUB: Citizens' Utility Board

EJ: environmental justice

EJLI: Environmental Justice Leadership Institute

ET: energy transition

ETO: energy transition organization

EV: electric vehicle

GDP: gross domestic product

HB 2021: Oregon House Bill 2021

IGBP: International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme

IOU: investor-owned utility

OCEO: Oregon Clean Energy Opportunity

PGE: Portland General Electric

PUC: public utility commission

RMT: resource mobilization theory

RPS: renewable portfolio standard

SMO: social movement organization

Chapter I

Introduction

It is far past nightfall and a group of travelers finds itself behind schedule, traversing a steep, cold and windy ridgeline, still miles from the nearest place they can seek shelter against the weather. They are weary, disgruntled, and internally each one stews over the reasons for their circumstance. Each one concludes that someone else was the main cause of delay – one of them stopping to rest, another to take far too many pictures, or another leading them down an erroneous path for a time before realizing the mistake. Yet the group has a long way to go tonight, and each traveler has only one flashlight – not enough to last the whole way. So, they must stay together and take turns sharing the light. The terrain is treacherous, and any small misstep would be catastrophic – and a rescue effort for any of them would endanger the whole party. Thus, together, they must tread deliberately, taking care to steer clear of the precipice edges that seem to surround them on all sides.

The United States finds itself in a similar situation - with multiple crises that seem poised to catapult us, flailing and slipping, down one of many unforgiving slopes. This dissertation focuses on two such crises, which are interdependent. One is the ecological crisis – disruptions of environmental systems unprecedented in recorded human history, which not only causes immense ecological damage and human suffering, but also threatens to undermine the very bases of subsistence of humanity, alongside other species. The other crisis is one of civil society – the breakdown of civic dialogue and entrenchment of ideological and political polarization in our society, pertaining to environmental issues among many others. Like the travelers, we must tread carefully and deliberately, for to focus too intensively on one of these crises while losing sight of

the other would be disastrous. We must also, like the travelers, engage in this work collectively. No one segment of society can successfully go it alone, and if any segment of society is neglected it could result in all of us falling together.

In this dissertation I examine how a social movement navigates this environment as it works to address the ecological crisis above. I also consider the impacts of this social movement's work on the second crisis, that of civil society. I use the energy transition movement away from fossil fuels and toward renewable energy as a case in which these two crises are particularly pertinent. The energy system spans vast physical space, involving communities that encompass all varieties of social positions and ideologies, and the energy transition (ET) movement must navigate these differences as it pursues its goals. I examine the challenges and opportunities for bridge-building in the ET movement across social, cultural and geographic divides. Of particular interest is the nature of bridge-building that occurs in the movement and the priorities that energy transition organizations give to different kinds of bridge-building. I draw from a variety of theoretical tools to help understand the circumstances in which the movement operates and the decisions and tradeoffs organizations make, and then to think through how the social movement actions impact the dual crises described above. I also use social theory prescriptively to help identify new means of bridge-building in the movement. Capital benefits from division that inhibits bridge-building and collective action, so I follow capital and power as a thread running throughout these chapters. The outcome is a constructive critique of the environmental movement from a critical sociological perspective. The intention of such a critique is the strengthening the movement and, even more, contributing to the work of avoiding the dual crises this dissertation aims to address.

The Ecological Crisis

A series of 24 graphs published by the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) in 2015 depicts twelve ecological or earth-system trends such as species loss, atmospheric carbon dioxide, and loss of forest cover; and twelve socioeconomic trends such as growth domestic product (GDP), energy consumption, and population during the time since 1750 (Angus 2016: 38). The graphs all depict a similar pattern: a generally steady or very slow increase in each indicator until around 1950, and a rapid increase after, taking the shape of what is now termed the "hockey-stick graph" that depicts atmospheric CO_2. Many earth systems have thresholds that constitute points of no return, wherein damage to the ecosystem becomes irreparable (Angus 2016). In 2007 the Stockholm Resilience Center led a team of top earth system scientists to identify "planetary boundaries" for key ecosystem processes – the limit to stay within to avoid entering a "zone of uncertainty" where it would be increasingly likely to cross the threshold of irreparable damage (Angus 2016: 71). In the 2015 update to their assessment, the scientists concluded that four of the planetary boundaries had been exceeded: climate change and land-use change were now in the zone of uncertainty, and biospheric integrity and biogeochemical flows were past the zone of uncertainty, in the "high risk" zone (Angus 2016: 76). Even more worrisome is the concern that some ecosystem processes likely entail feedback mechanisms, whereby a speeding up of process A could cause an acceleration in process B, which can further accelerate process A, and so on (Foster, Clark & York 2010: 424).

As a result of climate change as well as rapid changes in other earth system processes, communities across the country and the world are experiencing disasters such as wildfires, droughts, floods, tsunamis, and hurricanes at increasing rates of frequency and severity, and in new locations. Air, water and soil are being polluted with untold quantities of untold chemicals,

which are appearing in our blood cells, tissues and bones. In the U.S., rates of chronic illness such as diabetes and cancer are increasing, due in part to ingestion, inhalation and absorption of such hidden toxins. Additionally, other chemicals are deliberately added to foods we consume, some of which are listed right on the label, and these often compensate for the decreased quantity and quality of actual nutrients in foods. These health and environmental impacts are unevenly distributed so that certain groups, often those that have been historically marginalized, are most heavily impacted.

In the United States, the response to these crises has been piecemeal and inadequate, and subject to various fallacies (York 2012; York & Bell 2019; York & Rosa 2003) inherent in the view that modernization and technological innovation will lead inevitably to the resolution of the ecological crisis (Spaargaren & Mol 2013). What goes unrecognized in this perspective is the systemic and interconnected nature of these catastrophes – their simultaneity is no coincidence. Critical environmental sociology locates the fundamental cause of ecological disruption of this magnitude and ubiquity in the system of capitalism. Alongside the contributions Karl Marx is most known for – the development of the theory of capital, value, and labor's relation with capital in the production process – he also developed a materialist conception of the relationship between society and nature under the system of capitalism.

Marx identified how surplus value is extracted from not only labor but also land, and so developed one of the foundations of critical, materialist environmental sociology. The exploitation and extraction of surplus value from labor he referred to as the "absolute general law of capitalist accumulation" (Foster, Clark & York 2010: 207-208). The difference between a worker's pay and the worker's actual value to capital is called surplus value, which is accumulated by capital. Capital similarly accumulates surplus value from the degradation of

labor's means of reproduction – both environmental and social – a principle referred to as the absolute general law of environmental degradation (Foster, Clark & York 2010: 208). Capital will always seek to maximize profit, and labor and nature are deemed, by capital, to be "free gifts" (Foster, Clark & York 2010: 57), to be exploited – overworked, degraded, mined, contaminated – to as great an extent as capital can get away with.

Marx considered the relationship between society and nature a metabolism, highlighting the relationship's material basis. He observed that prior to the spread of capitalism, beginning with the English land enclosures, urban and rural areas, or "town" and "country", were involved in a mutually beneficial exchange, centered on use-values. (Foster 2000: 141). Justus von Liebig had previously identified the ecological imbalance that resulted from a net transport of nutrients from country to city in the form of food, and the lack of replenishment of those nutrients in the countryside soil (the nutrients ended up as sewage in the cities) (Foster 2000: 76-77). Marx linked this rift to the historical development of social relations that generated it – that is, to capitalism (Foster, Clark & York 2010: 77). As capital extracts surplus value from nature and human communities, it disrupts social and ecological systems and further widens the metabolic rift. Labor and nature functioning outside of, or prior to, the capitalist system, generate use-value: the products they generate are used for purposes of social reproduction. Capital, however, uses both nature and labor to generate exchange-value via commodities exchanged for profit.

In this view, humanity faces a global water crisis, for example, not because we simply have yet to find the biggest, best water purification system to generate enough supply to match a growing water demand, but rather because we allow corporations to take, use, and pollute water for reasons unrelated to use-value. Today this process of capital accumulation is so ubiquitous it becomes unnoticeable; it appears to be the "natural" way of things. Yet there is nothing natural

about any political-economic system – let alone one designed such that it cannot help but undermine the material and social bases of human existence.

The Crisis of Civil Society

This social-ecological system characterized by capital accumulation and exploitation did not develop in a vacuum; alongside and intertwined with it evolved contemporary social structure and culture. It is there where we can observe the second crisis that this dissertation addresses, and which also threatens to push us off a precipice. This crisis concerns civil society, and it can both delay progress in addressing the ecological crisis described above, and also lead society away from democratic principles and down a path of authoritarianism, threatening all forms of social (and ecological) equity and well being.

The United States is a divided society, with wide gulfs across views on policy proposals and social issues as well as ideological identification. Political science acknowledges multiple kinds of political polarization. Some argue that we have seen increasing rates of ideological polarization, while others claim that ideological polarization is high among elites but not among the mass public (Axelrod et al 2021). We experience polarization also as party sorting, or the extent to which perspectives on certain issues become clustered with each other and with a particular political party (Abrams & Fiorina 2016). Most scholars agree that recent decades have witnessed increases in the United States in affective polarization (Axelrod et al 2021), which can be defined as differences in opinion toward and treatment of out-groups relative to in-groups. Political scientists have identified tipping points in political polarization models pertaining to both the general public (Axelrod et al 2021) and elites (Macy et al 2021); political and social

processes pertaining to polarization can operate in spiraling feedback loops, much like they do in global ecological systems.

Polarization can have multiple impacts. For example, it can reduce the diversity of ideas available for problem-solving (Benson 2023) necessary for a well-functioning democracy. Affective polarization can influence who people enter into relationships with and where they live (Iyengar et al 2019). Polarization can facilitate the development of echo chambers and the ability of misinformation to spread unchecked through more segregated informational networks (Ribeiro et al 2017). In association with the development of a right-wing "alternative media ecosystem" political polarization in the form of party sorting has contributed to the rise of misinformation (Kelkar 2019). It can increase animosity between groups, making them more willing to accept anti-democratic measures on the part of the state to control or intimidate the opposing group (Arbatli & Rosenberg 2021). Scholars have observed that "modern democracies do not collapse in one day – in contrast, they die gradually and "by stealth" (Arbatli & Rosenberg 2021: 2). Electoral manipulation, such as in the form of voter suppression, is one warning sign of a government's authoritarian tendencies.

Aside from these direct impacts on democratic principles and institutions, polarization can also inhibit progress toward important societal goals at the international (Perrings, Hechter & Mamada 2021) or national level. In the United States, we see this occurring regarding environmental issues. On average, identification as a Republican or political conservative is associated with lower levels of both concern for climate change (Marquart-Pyatt et al 2014; McCright & Dunlap 2011) and support for climate policies (McCright et al 2014). Political orientation has been shown to impact views on energy transition in particular (Mayer 2019) and

both populism and political polarization can hinder progress on energy transition (Fraune & Knodt 2018).

Political polarization concerning climate change has been fostered by an anti-climate-change-action campaign mobilized by elements of the conservative movement in conjunction with fossil fuel companies and other large corporations. Beginning in 1989 (Brulle 2019), a set of conservative think-tanks, in conjunction with industry partners launched an attack on environmental science (Jacques, Dunlap & Freeman 2008), science and reflexivity more generally (McCright & Dunlap 2010; McCright et al 2016), and climate science in particular (Jacques, Dunlap & Freeman 2008). Instead of opposing environmental efforts directly, the counter-movement framed environmental protection as a policy debate (Jacques, Dunlap & Freeman 2008), arguing that climate action would be bad for the economy. This left a path open for workers to oppose a "policy issue," and environmentalists could be framed as political adversaries. Part of that movement's success has been its ability to connect environmental issues with threats to core values of society (Jacques, Dunlap & Freeman 2008: 352). Industry shifted to advocating for an ecological modernization approach to solving environmental problems, which relies upon continued economic growth and technological innovation to increase efficiency, reduce waste, and "de-couple" economic growth from material resource demands (Spaargaren & Mol 2013).

Political divides are also spatial and "placed". Rural and urban areas are home to, on average, different political environments (Kelly & Lobao 2019). They also have been shown to host different environmental concerns (Hamilton et al 2014). For a variety of political, cultural and economic reasons, rural regions may be particularly prone to experiencing alignment with populist ideologies (Berlet & Sunshine 2019; Edelman 2019; Montenegro de Wit 2019) and

authoritarian ideologies (Edelman 2019; Montenegro de Wit 2019). Given the important role rural and urban areas each play in the social-ecological metabolism, ideological divides between them merit particular attention. Differences in perspectives on energy transition between residents of rural and urban areas are evident, although the full picture of people's perspectives on energy and energy transition depends on a multitude of factors including their past experiences with the energy system.

Energy System Landscape

The fossil fuel energy system is an excellent case in which to study bridge-building across cultural and geographical divides. The energy system consists of diverse infrastructure spanning the entire country for processes such as mining/drilling/extracting, processing/refining, transportation, distribution, consumption, and waste management. These processes are metabolic in the ecological Marxist sense in that they constitute interactions between society and the environment – interactions that provide a means of material subsistence to society, but that have also been commodified by capital.

The vastness of the geographical territory encompassed and impacted by the fossil fuel energy system also means there is a wide range of communities that are stakeholders in the energy transition. These communities have different historical and ongoing experiences relative to the fossil fuel energy system including environmental, health, economic and social impacts. A community's historical place-based experiences importantly influence residents' perspectives (Brehm et al 2006; Hamilton et al 2010) Consequently, communities have a range of perspectives on the shift away from fossil fuels and the energy transition movement itself. Communities have variably experienced injustices and inequities, benefits and gains, or both in

the fossil fuel energy system; different communities will also encounter this same range of experiences in the transition away from it. While this range of experiences has often been conceptualized as a distinction between "winners" and "losers" in the fossil fuel energy system, and in the energy transition, the reality for most communities is more nuanced.

The vastness of the energy system also creates unique governance challenges (Goldthau & Sovacool 2012). It is a vertically complex system in that within a state or country there are multiple nested systems involved in the extraction, generation or distribution of a particular form of energy, which could be governed at multiple scales of government. For example, city, county, state and federal government entities might all have jurisdiction over different components of a coal commodity chain spanning mine, rail, power plant, and power lines. Such a system may also be horizontally integrated across many state jurisdictions. Systemic governance of entire energy systems by a single entity is rare (Healy & Barry 2017). Moreover, despite recent federal efforts to increase renewable energy supply and some piecemeal efforts to support displaced fossil fuel workers under more progressive Administrations there is a general lack of federal policies and programs that comprehensively address energy transition issues.

This results in nationally disjointed and haphazard efforts on the part of social movement organizations to reign in unfettered capital control of the energy system at the scales at which they have power. In some cases, this may look like community groups appealing to their city council or town board to enact carbon emissions controls or local bans on particular fossil fuel usage or infrastructure permitting. In other cases, organizations work at the state level to pass bills limiting carbon emissions or providing support for displaced fossil fuel workers. Addressing inequities in the energy system and in the energy transition across these different scales and

jurisdictions is challenging (Healy & Barry 2017). Yet together these are the political, social, and economic circumstances in which the ET movement must operate.

Emergence of the Energy Transition Movement(s)

From this energy landscape emerged, over time, the present-day energy transition movement(s). A social movement cannot be separated from its historical development and context (Cini et al 2017: 433), and the ET movement emerged from a variety of historical roots. Broadly speaking, one major variety of energy transition advocacy focuses squarely on technological transition from one technology to another with the goal of reducing carbon emissions. This approach grew from the mainstream environmental movement and the emergence of climate change in the late 1900s and early 2000s as the focal issue of the movement. In this version of ET advocacy social and economic change or transformation are not a goal. In fact, proponents of this approach to energy transition include large institutionalized interests, both capital and otherwise. While capital has historically navigated this terrain by promoting climate denial and skepticism, many capital interests now embrace the idea that climate change should be addressed; instead of denying it they seek opportunity to profit from it through investments in renewable technology, as well as investment opportunities that arise with natural disasters (Angus 2016).

The other major approach to the energy transition movement, broadly speaking, is the just transition movement, whose history I turn to next. One branch of the just transition movement had its roots in the labor-environment struggles and coalitions of nearly half a century ago, including early collaborations surrounding workplace health and safety (Healy & Barry 2017; Morena et al 2018). The figurehead of this branch of JT is Tony Mazzocchi, a leader of the

Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union in the 1970s-1990s (Foster 2019; Morena et al 2018). Mazzocchi and his collaborators in other labor unions and organizations believed the industries they worked in were environmentally harmful, but they sought solutions that would protect both the environment and their union members' jobs (Morena et al 2018: 6). They developed the idea of a "Superfund for Workers" in the 1990s in order to push back against the "jobs vs. environment" discourse (Morena et al 2018) which claims that environmental protection and job protection are incompatible (Foster 1993; Foster 2019. The term "just transition" emerged from this discourse in the mid-1990s (Morena et al 2018).

While the idea of just transition declined in popularity in the U.S. in the first decade at the turn of the century, it spread globally (Morena et al 2018). Morena et al (2018) argue that global trade unions at that time became the primary promoters of JT, and that the concept shifted from one centering on community and occupational health concerns to the global issue of climate change. Since about 2010, the term has again become more widely used in the United States – this time among a broader range of organizations, notably in grassroots environmental and social justice organizations (Morena et al 2018).

This more recent wave of support for the concept of just transition in the U.S. emerged from awareness of environmental injustices wrought by the fossil fuel energy system on historically marginalized communities. Some organizations use the term energy justice to capture this specific set of priorities. Many of the more newly emerging articulations of JT among grassroots organizations emphasize the interconnectedness of ecological, social and economic struggles, advocating for comprehensive overhaul of not only the energy system but the system of capitalism and its concomitant oppressions. In this view, different kinds of justice are enumerated and prioritized. Distributive justice pertains to the equitable allocation of

environmental benefits and harms (Crowe & Li 2020), the traditional concerns of the original environmental justice movement. Recognition justice refers to groups or communities being considered in processes that affect them; and procedural justice refers to equitable involvement in regulatory and governance processes (Crowe & Li 2020).

Thus, while the JT movement began in the labor movement's concern for workers who would be impacted by crucial water and air quality legislation (Healy & Barry 2017; Morena et al 2018) (a classic example of a labor-environment coalition), it has since expanded to include a greater emphasis on "downstream" communities and workers already experiencing environmental injustices from fossil fuel extraction (Healy & Barry 2017) (often termed "environmental justice communities" in the literature). In fact, in their assessment of JT movements internationally, Krawchenko and Gordon (2021) caution against the JT movement possessing a "hyper-fixation" on measures for workers, arguing that community needs must be considered too.

So evolved what is now considered the Just Transition movement(s), sometimes referred to in the plural to reflect the multitude of branches. The diverse history of the Just Transition movement has resulted in the concept now having different meanings within the movement, an observation that is well recognized in the literature (Galgoczi 2020; Heffron & McCauley 2018; Morena et al 2018; Newell & Mulvaney 2013; Stevis & Felli 2015). The different conceptualizations of just transition have been classified in the literature as reactive and proactive (Mertins-Kirkwood 2018). Proactive approaches are described as those associated with creating opportunities in a renewable energy economy for those who are already currently disenfranchised ("environmental justice communities"), as this focus is associated more with the more progressive and, within the context of the JT movement, more recent, goal of economic and

socio-ecological transformation. On the other hand, approaches associated more narrowly with ensuring justice for those who stand to lose in the transition to a renewable economy (ex. fossil fuel workers) are termed reactive (Mertins-Kirkwood 2018), likely because their scope is more limited and because they do not emphasize the newer turn of the Just Transition movement.

Morena et al (2018) articulate a more complex and perhaps more useful framework to analyze differences among Just Transition discourses. They argue that the types of discourses found across the movement vary based on: a) the type of justice sought, for whom, and how it should be sought; b) political and ideological beliefs (those focused on market-based solutions and the "simple claim for jobs creation in the green economy" on the one hand, and those focused on completely transforming the economy away from capitalism on the other) (somewhat similar to Mertins-Kirkwood's (2018) classification); and c) whether the discourse conceives of one group or constituency as a gateway toward an entire low-carbon world, or focuses only on change in a certain economic sector – a factor that the authors conceptualize as the degree of inclusivity or exclusivity of the discourse (Morena et al 2018: 11-12). Differences between frames that consider the energy transition more a sociotechnical issue of incremental technology transition and those that advocate for a more comprehensive and holistic transitions of the entire political-economic structure are also highlighted by other scholars (e.g.: Wang & Lo 2021). These framings correspond, roughly, with the ecological modernization (Spaargaren & Mol 2013) and ecological Marxist (Foster, Clark & York 2010) perspectives described above.

Energy Transition Movement as Networked Places

The energy transition movement, like the fossil fuel energy system, is "placed" – that is, it exists in places. The movement is also networked; thus we can consider the movement a

network of places – a fact that impacts the capabilities of the movement and the organizations within it. Theoretical insights from social network theory as well as theories of place can illuminate these impacts.

Places can influence the values and priorities of individuals and organizations. People in different places have different experiences that can influence their perspectives (Routledge 2013:1). "Place has a central role in shaping claims, identities and capacities of mobilized political agents, helping to explain why social movements occur where they do, how the particularities of specific places influence the character and emergence of various forms of contentious action, and the context within which movement agency interpolates the social structure" (Routledge 2013: 1-2). A place and all of its social, cultural, economic, political and environmental characteristics can influence the kind of social movement activity that emerges there, who becomes involved in it, and what it can accomplish.

Scholars have theorized two overarching views of place: place as territorial and place as relational (Nicholls 2009). In terms of social movements, the territorial view attends to issues of a specific bounded place, and how relations developed there can strengthen social movement cohesion and also create opportunities for division through boundary-making. Additionally, the territorial view describes how specific places mobilize certain facets of identity or social statuses and make them relevant as political values or attitudes. On the other hand, the relational view argues that living in the same place doesn't imply similar interests, political perspectives, or social characteristics; relational place scholars instead view places as areas where diverse actors interact in unstructured ways (Nicholls 2009: 80). In this view, the individual places where social movement actors live and work are often "strung together" to create a "loosely constituted 'social movement space'" (Nicholls 2009: 80). Nicholls (2009) considers these two perspectives

to be complementary and summarizes their synthesis by arguing that places can both be sites of the development of strong ties and solidarity, and sites of interaction of diverse actors.

Places in the ET movement are connected by networks. Networks consist of nodes connected by ties. In social networks nodes can represent individuals, organizations, or other social entities, while ties represent social relationships or flows of resources or information. Networks "socialise and connect activists, facilitate information flows, help to create solidarity and shared identities, influence decision-making processes, and…importantly, can limit membership if they fail to create brokerage opportunities to (potentially) new participants" (Pierce et al 2011: 56). From social network theory we know that ties tend to be more likely with people who are like them, a principle called homophily. Ties also tend to be more likely with people who are physically near them, a principle known as propinquity. There are qualitatively different kinds of ties, which can be variably affected by homophily, propinquity, and other network factors. Social network literature identifies important differences between "strong" and "weak" ties, where strong ties are deeper and typically more durable connections, often formed through more extensive and intensive interaction. Weak ties are those that are not as intensive or even meaningful to people but can perform important network functions such as acting as a conduit of information or resources between different parts of a network (Granovetter 1973)

Different kinds of networks that are formed in localized or non-localized manners tend to foster different kinds of ties (strong vs. weak, respectively) as well as different kinds of resources for social movements (emotional, material, and symbolic; or information, financing, and political backing, respectively) (Nicholls 2009). While strong ties can also exist across geographic distance (Nicholls 2009: 83), proximity fosters strong social movement ties for three reasons: greater opportunity for connections, common acquaintances, overlapping issues; reduced risk of

poor investments of time or resources, particularly for small, low-resource organizations; and the stability of interactions over time (Nicholls 2009; Routledge 2013). Strong ties may more effectively prompt activists to contribute more of their own time and resources to the movement than weak ties (Nicholls 2009). Yet weak ties can not only provide access to resources from distant and disconnected parts of a network (Granovetter 1973), they can also serve important bridging functions.

A single social movement may span multiple scales (e.g., local, regional, national, international) and may experience more favorable political opportunities, resource availability or cultural context at one scale or another. While the resources and power of local-level organizations is often limited, they may possess socio-structural resources (like deep, strong interpersonal connections and networks) that national affiliate organizations can mobilize (Nicholls 2009). At the same time, certain socio-ecological problem (like climate change) or adversaries (like large corporations) may require such levels of resources that local organizations may feel obligated to network or affiliate with others to match those resource levels. A movement or an individual organization may move resources between these different scalar levels in a process termed "scale shift" (Routledge 2013).

Contested Energy Transition

Having outlined the landscape of the energy transition movement, we now consider in greater detail the contention and opposition it faces within some groups and communities and that it must contend with if it seeks to engage in bridge-building with such groups. Opposition to energy transition in general, or to particular programs or policy proposals, can be found in different places across the United States, but communities that have historically been home to

fossil fuel extraction facilities (like mines), power plants, and certain other facilities, which I collectively call fossil fuel dependent communities, are the most common sites of opposition (although fossil fuel dependent communities as a group exhibit a range of support and opposition, with clear in-community variation).

In resource-dependent communities, local extractive industry entities such as the owner of a local mine or power plant can influence public opinion via power rooted in land ownership (McNeil 2011; Scott 2010), regulatory capture and ownership of the means of production (Fox 1999), control over the environmental conditions in which people live and work (Bell 2016; McNeil 2011), and a combination of constructed (Bell & York 2010) and/or real economic dependence on the industry. Companies use strategies consistent with Lukes' (2005) three dimensions of power to maintain hegemony – from overt political influence in the form of lobbying or lawsuits (first dimension), to control over public discourse through elaborate rhetorical strategies (second dimension) to subtly changing the perceived 'wants' of individuals subjected to their rhetoric, manipulating the ideologies and perspectives within a community (third dimension).

Companies often draw upon locally relevant cultural identities or values. In a West Virginia coal mining community, for example, coal companies successfully generated a "community economic identity" surrounding the then-economically insignificant coal industry by drawing upon the (gendered) American cultural icons of the "provider" and "defender" (Bell & York 2010). Similarly, when Arlie Hochschild interviewed rural Louisianans about their perspectives on the increasing local environmental degradation wrought by fossil fuel extraction, many remained supportive of the industries. They remained loyal to fossil fuel extraction, proud to be working hard for the country and for capitalism (Hochschild 2016). They endured the

environmental and health catastrophes they faced quietly and proudly, holding tightly to what they viewed as American values, which trumped any latent environmental concerns.

Of course, residents of fossil fuel communities are not passive recipients of ideologies. Smith (2009) has argued compellingly that residents of the Powder River Basin coal mining region in Wyoming have drawn upon corporate discourse to hold companies accountable to their promises. Moreover, perspectives of individuals and communities develop in rational and pragmatic ways in the context of their cultural, political and economic lived realities. People living in places with a history of fossil fuel dependence may feel reluctant to embrace renewable energy installations locally for the simple reason that they want to avoid again engaging in a similar extractive relationship with an energy company (Crowe & Li 2020: 6). Contorno (2019) points out that embrace of a just transition approach tracks well with the extent to which one's own livelihood will be impacted by it. She found that just transition was most accepted by segments of the labor movement in "unaffected sectors" like service and education, while people in "affected" sectors like fossil fuel industries often expressed opposition (2019: 135). Some fossil fuel workers feel that environmental groups are pushing to eliminate their jobs without caring for their fate (Robinson 2020). While the reasons for a particular individual's or community's perspectives concerning energy transition are numerous, these frequently observed patterns constitute one facet of the political and ideological context that ET organizations (ETOs) must navigate, and they shape opportunities for bridge-building.

Bridge-Building: Best Practices and Constraints

An energy transition organization seeking to engage with a community possessing complex and sometimes oppositional views toward the idea of energy transition must draw upon

bridge-building strategies. Bridge-building is a process of working to engage across ideological, cultural or other differences, sometimes simply called "bridging" (Coley 2014; Harris & Young 2008). Social movement organizations can engage in bridge-building with individuals or unorganized groups of people, or they can join with other social movement organizations in a coalition. Aside from contributing to ameliorating the crisis of civil society identified above, engaging in bridge-building can have direct benefits to a social movement organization or to a social movement as a whole. Broad coalitions, which can be achieved through bridge-building efforts, can mobilize more people in more places (Gawerc 2019). When considered in network terms, a broad coalition can allow an organization in one part of the coalition, or network, to access informational, financial, human or other resources located in another part of the network. This can be accomplished through bridge brokers, or individuals or organizations that bridge two segments of a network and that can transmit various resources between them (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001; Crossley & Diani 2019; Robinson 2020). Broad coalitions can also bring a social movement greater political resilience and legitimacy (Gawerc 2019), as they are supported by people from a wider range of cultural, political and geographic backgrounds.

Social movement actors have developed successful bridge-building strategies including frame alignment (Snow, Vliegenthart & Ketelaars 2019) and the development of collective identities (Fominaya 2019), to gain support for their movement. Organizations practice frame alignment when they work to find or create areas of overlap between the frame used by their organization to interpret a particular circumstance, and those used by others with whom they wish to ally. Social movement organizations may be constrained by, but can also intentionally harness, particular institutional logics or master frames (Jasper & Polletta: 2019: 68). Similar to but distinct from frames, shared stories or narratives have also been demonstrated to be useful

bridge-building tools. “Shared stories of outrage” can help organizations coalesce a collective consciousness around a common injustice or opponent (Beamish and Leubbers 2009). Organizations frame their issues and modify that framing strategically (Allen & Hadden 2017: 602) for different audiences. For example, organizations might deploy particular narratives that have cultural relevance in the region in which they work.

Scholars also find that collective identity formation is important for optimal social movement efficacy. Development of a collective identity involves individuals identifying with a group and its characteristics or circumstances and having positive feelings toward members of that group (Polletta & Jasper 2001). Participation in a social movement requires that, at least temporarily, the movement’s collective identity and an individual’s salient identity are in alignment. The need to develop collective identity can shape social movement decision-making. For example, having too broad an area of focus may contribute to a lack of collective identity and too splintered a membership for an organization to be successful (Olzak & Johnson 2019: 180), so an organization may choose to narrow its focus.

Bridge-building can entail navigating different habitus (Jasper & Polletta 2019) and other cultural differences. Practices of intentional inclusivity can help organizations not only create a welcoming space for culturally diverse others but also actively determine who is not “at the table” (Coley, Raynes & Das 2020) – an essential first step in identifying potential organizations or populations with whom bridge-building might further a social movement’s cause. The development of trust is commonly cited as an important component of bridge-building in diverse social movements (Gawerc 2019; Mix 2011) because it helps facilitate interactions across ideological or cultural differences. Social movement organizations may work to build trust though personal communication, education and events or other spaces in which to share time

(Gawerc 2021; Harris & Young 2010; Mix 2011). Such efforts may help social movement participants overcome homophily effects, understand and accept differences, and potentially identify areas of common interest or identity. Bridge-building is often, therefore, easier or more straightforward to accomplish in local communities (Harris & Young 2008). Repeated interactions that occur in a local place can foster strong ties (Nicholls 2009) and trust. Additionally, working within a local community allows social movement actors to draw upon place frames (Martin 2003) – social movement frames developed from a common experience of a place to connect with people with whom they may share little else in common.

While practices such as those just described can facilitate successful bridge-building, social movement organizations operate in an environment of material constraints, which generates tradeoffs between bridge-building and other organizational priorities. These constraints pertain to resource availability and political opportunity. Resource availability may shape the priorities of social movement organizations. According to resource mobilization theory (RMT), various resources and the pursuit of additional resources influence organizational actions, and the success of organizations depends in part on their human, social-organizational (ex: infrastructures, social ties and networks, affinity groups, coalitions), cultural, or moral resources (Edwards, McCarthy and Mataic 2018: 80). The availability of certain resources, or the likelihood of obtaining access to certain ones through any of these methods, could affect the decisions that social movement organizations make regarding the issues they choose to pursue, or the people they choose to recruit or ally with. For example, social movement organizations that incorporate too wide a range of issues may be less successful at attracting resources like highly committed supporters (Olzak & Johnson 2019: 180).

The political environment in which social movement organizations operate also guides or constraints decision making and the relative priority given to bridge-building. The goals of social movement organizations are inherently political – whether they are aimed toward the state itself or another social institution. McAdam (1982) emphasized how political opportunities and threats influence social movement formation and success, a notion that came to be known as political process theory. Other scholars have expanded political process theory beyond its early focus on state or public-sector targets to include educational or other institutional targets, including a recent focus on corporations (McAdam & Tarrow 2019: 31). In this broader view, social movement organizations, political institutions, and corporations all act within and are influenced by a political opportunity structure (Rojas & King 2018: 209). For example, due to limited political opportunities after the Copenhagen climate summit, climate change organizations engaged in a "strategic reorientation," expanding their targets beyond national legislation to community- or regional-level targets like coal plants and the Keystone pipeline; shifting their tactics to grassroots efforts; and aiming to change cultural norms (Hadden 2017).

Bridge-building efforts, therefore, take place in a complicated and sometimes chaotic social movement space in which social movement organizations experience competing priorities. In this context, organizations may scramble to piece together resources and movement coalitions with whomever they can, and resource-intense investments in bridge-building may not materialize without concerted and dedicated effort.

Emerging Tensions and Research Questions

We have observed that the energy system acts as a material and social link between a vast range of communities located in different places, with different cultures. A combination of

political, economic and social factors, abetted by capital, has created a situation in which energy transition is contested in some of these places. The energy transition movement emerged from multiple historical roots and encompasses several approaches, ranging from reformist to transformative. Several tensions and questions emerge from these circumstances.

First, while bridge-building work might benefit the energy transition movement as a whole, it is not the priority of most ETOs. In fact, other movement priorities can operate in tension with bridge-building activities – whether they are undertaken for the primary purpose of bridging or not. The ways in which various other social movement activities impact organizations' abilities to engage in bridge-building merits investigation.

Second, the geographical distribution of fossil fuel system infrastructure is accompanied by a distribution of communities that are stakeholders in the energy transition. Likewise, the energy transition movement itself has a spatial distribution, and these distributions do not necessarily align. Might certain communities be left out of the ET movement conversation if they are not located where ET movement activities are concentrated? How do ET movement organizations prioritize bridge-building efforts when the stakeholders in the energy transition span such vast social and geographical space?

Third, different branches of the energy transition movement focus on the interests of communities that occupy different positions "upstream" or "downstream" along the energy commodity chain, as well as those differently situated within or outside the energy transition movement space. Some communities, particularly those located outside the ET movement space and "upstream" on the energy commodity chain, may differ culturally from many justice-focused ETOs and may have different perspectives on the ET. What underlying similarities can social

theory reveal about these diverse communities that can serve as common grounds on which to build collective action?

These kinds of questions are important in addressing the dual crises that opened this dissertation. Like any social institution, social movements can reproduce the power structures in which they exist – perpetuating either or both of the aforementioned dual crises. Yet in research on energy transition, little attention is given to the movement's agency to, instead, work to subvert the existing power structure through bridge-building. Toward this end I address in this dissertation the following research questions:

1) **How do energy transition movement organizations navigate bridge-building?** Specifically, what strategies are most successful and what challenges do they face? What influences their decisions about when to engage in bridge-building and with whom?

2) **How can bridge-building across the energy system's vast social and geographic divides be made more feasible?** How can social theory inform such a task?

Methods

To address these questions I engaged in a multimodal investigation of perspectives and experiences of energy transition organization leaders, as well as members of two communities that are stakeholders in the energy transition. I used both qualitative interviews and ethnographic (participant-observation) approaches to gather different and complementary kinds of data. The use of both methods also enabled me to investigate the energy transition movement at both "micro" and "macro" scales. To address the first research question I sought to gain insights from

leaders of a breadth of ETOs to identify the range of challenges and successes organizations face in bridge-building in the challenging ET movement space. Themes identified in interviews helped to guide my inquiry into the second research question. At the same time I also wanted to gain in-depth understanding of particular communities positioned differently in the energy system and ET movement space, which I was able to do during ethnographic fieldwork. Fine-grained insights from this approach inform both research questions.

Interviews

Interviews allow a researcher to ask directed questions focused on a particular subject. Since the interviews I conducted were semi-structured, I used an interview guide. I veered from the guide when I wanted to expand on something a participant said but, for the most part, the topics we discussed were ones that I had pre-identified. The interviews I conducted were not designed to be representative of either ETOs as a whole or any particular subset thereof. Rather, I considered the interviews cases to examine for elucidation of potential patterns and processes. They allowed me to investigate the ET movement across different organizations located in different kinds of places across thirteen states. I use the dataset as a whole to observe a wide swathe of organizational practices from different vantage points across the ET movement.

In the interviews I spoke with thirty staff members or leaders of twenty energy transition organizations. Organizations were located in regions with varying histories and experiences with fossil fuel extraction, processing and combustion, and the accompanying economic, ecological and social consequences. Organizational areas of focus also varied within the energy transition movement (i.e.: carbon reduction, community development, environmental justice, etc.), as did the degree to which organizations were focused on bridge-building (ranging from bridging being

a substantial part of the organization's work to it not being an overly recognized component of its work). Participants too had various roles in their organizations including community organizers, policy advocates, and communications managers. I thus gathered information from individual participants embedded in their organizational context.

Recruitment consisted of emails to individual staff members' email addresses, as listed on organizations' websites, or generic organization email addresses were used if necessary. The overall response rate was about 50%. About seventy percent of participants presented as women, a figure relatively consistent with the gender distribution in the environmental organizing field. Only about twenty percent of participants were identified by me as people of color. This figure roughly aligns with the racial/ethnic ratios of many energy transition organizations located in rural fossil fuel extraction regions. It is, however, far below the ratio for some others, particularly organizations focusing on extraction in tribal regions, as well as many organizations in communities located further down the commodity chain (near power plants, for example). While opposition to energy transition, the major subject of this study, is concentrated in largely white fossil fuel extraction regions, it is certainly not exclusively found there, and the relative lack of voices of people of color is a limitation of this study.

The majority of participants spoke with me on Zoom, although phone and in-person interviews were conducted when preferred by the participant. Interview duration ranged from just under thirty minutes to over two hours. I audio recorded all interviews and transcribed them using Sonix software, and I used Atlas.ti for data analysis.

Participant-observation

While conducting participant-observation, a researcher cannot, of course, pre-structure their conversations and experiences. The data I collected using this approach was therefore more wide-ranging in topic but was also more richly contextualized than the data I gathered during interviews. Conducting my fieldwork at multiple sites allowed me to see common ground and opportunities for bridging between diverse communities, which might otherwise go unnoticed in a single-site field study.

I focused my fieldwork in two communities – the Oregon Clean Energy Opportunity (OCEO) campaign in Oregon, and a fossil fuel dependent community, which I call Wilson, in rural Montana. They are different types of spaces. The OCEO campaign is a social movement entity and exists within a social movement space. The campaign as well as my fieldwork within it took place primarily (though not exclusively) virtually. Wilson, on the other hand, is an actual residential community. Within and adjacent to the energy transition movement there are a wide range of types of spaces and communities. The two types I consider here, an energy transition movement campaign and a fossil fuel dependent community, are common within the movement space. The selection of these two particular communities to study was not entirely arbitrary. I was aware at the time of case selection that some of the energy generated in Wilson was sent to Oregon, and I wanted to examine two communities that actually had a material connection to each other.

My fieldwork with OCEO took place over the course of three years. As a result of constraints due to COVID at the time, the campaign took place almost entirely virtually using Zoom meetings. I participated in three parts of that campaign. The first part consisted of a five-session Energy Justice Leadership Institute (EJLI) (Part I) that took place between December

2020 and January 2021, which was primarily focused on teaching grassroots participants about the energy system. Part II of EJLI was called the Grassroots Action Teams, which took place weekly between January and July 2021. The Grassroots Action Teams component was focused on continuing to educate grassroots participants, but this time the content was more heavily focused on training for grassroots participation in the legislative process, both generally and specifically concerning three OCEO-promoted bills. After EJLI Part II, I continued participation in the campaign's Community Advocates group, which was a smaller group that advised on implementation of the bills, from the perspectives of community members. This took place biweekly between October 2022 and October 2023. I also attended two Oregon Citizens' Utility Board (CUB) conferences to which I was invited as an OCEO participant in October 2022 and October 2023. At these conferences I was able to meet with fellow EJLI participants and leaders face-to-face, build camaraderie, and discuss energy-related issues in person.

I participated actively in sessions including contributing to conversations both in small and large group settings and asking questions. I did, however, wait until other participants had offered their input first, to reduce my influence on others' comments as much as I could. I also participated in practice exercises and actual participation in OCEO campaign events including providing testimony on a piece of legislation for a Public Utility Commission meeting and lobbying a representative to support one of the campaign's proposed bills. Data from participant observation activities are from either written field notes, review of meetings presentations and recordings, and general observations and insights gained from the experience of participating in the campaign. I was then able to combine these experiential and observational data with data from interviews with OCEO leaders, to learn about the campaign process from multiple perspectives. I audio recorded all interviews and transcribed them using Sonix software, and I

used Atlas.ti for data analysis. I also reviewed some Powerpoint presentations and recordings from meetings.

My fieldwork in Wilson consisted of participant-observation conducted while residing in the community as well as in-depth interviews conducted with four key informants. Fieldwork occurred over a more compressed timeline of approximately one week but was more intensive than my work with the OCEO campaign. In addition to the formal interviews I attended two public meetings and a site visit with one of my study participants. While I was in Wilson I observed and documented several aspects of the community in writing and with photographs. I paid careful attention to the types of businesses and amenities in the community, the appearance and "feel" of the neighborhoods, homes, and buildings, the layout of the town, and the pace of life. I observed how people spoke, behaved, and how they acted toward me. The mine and power plant infrastructure I photographed and recorded on video. During the public meetings I attended I paid attention to and took notes on how the meeting was structured, who spoke, what was said, attendees' appearances and behaviors, how many people were in attendance, and the overall "feel" of the meeting. In all fieldwork experiences I attended to the types of concerns community members were articulating. From these observations I generated quick "jottings" as well as more detailed field notes developed after I was out of the field for the day.

In addition to more quantifiable observations I drew upon my visceral and embodied reactions and experiences from both field sites as a valid source of data, and I contextualized these data with understanding of historical political and cultural context. I engaged in this work following qualitative researchers who have discussed the value of a researcher's emotions (emerald & Carpenter 2015) and embodied experiences (Hokkanen 2017) as data.

Data Analysis

My process of data analysis was similar for data gathered from interviews and participant-observation, but there were some differences. In both I identified emergent themes using a modified abductive reasoning approach (Timmermans & Tavory 2012). This method can be compared with grounded theory methodology (Charmaz & Belgrave 2012) in that instead of taking a theoretically entirely inductive approach, it advocates for a hybrid inductive-deductive approach. Its founders acknowledge that much sociological qualitative analysis is in fact not conducted entirely inductively and that an abductive approach better captures the process that many scholars engage in in practice.

For my interviews, I approached my analysis process with some ideas concerning the themes that I had heard during data collection. Additionally, I had some ideas about theoretical concepts that could be useful. Nonetheless, I wanted to allow other insights to emerge as well. I engaged in an iterative process of open coding and focused coding (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 2011), interspersed with reference to what was appearing to be relevant literature.

My analytical process for participant-observation experiences was slightly more inductive, particularly because I did not enter my field site with a specific guide to my conversations. However, since I conducted my participant-observation fieldwork after most of my interviews had already been conducted, I had already developed some preliminary ideas concerning the focus of my investigations there, and I did have a list of potential lines of inquiry.

Privacy and confidentiality

Ethical considerations of participant privacy and confidentiality are of utmost concern in qualitative research in which the researcher gathers data about people's thoughts, experiences

and lives. In this project I ensured that participant data were anonymized and de-identified and stored in secure locations to ensure participant privacy. Unless participants requested otherwise, the names of participants, any organizations with which they were affiliated, and their location of residence, were either omitted or given a pseudonym. In some cases, the names of other people and places were also changed in this document to ensure the privacy of participants or other related individuals. This study received approval from the University of Oregon's Institutional Review Board and was conducted in accordance with its guidelines for human subjects research.

Overview of chapters

In the chapters that follow I present focused investigations concerning the two research questions identified above. While each chapter approaches these questions from a slightly different angle, they all provide insights into how bridge-building is conducted and prioritized in the energy transition movement, and how social theory might be able to inform bridge-building work. I present a brief overview of these chapters below.

In Chapter II I address part of the first research question above, specifically concerning successful strategies to build bridges in the energy transition movement, as well as factors that influence the ability of ETOs to engage in bridge-building. The chapter discusses how one type of activity that some social movement organizations engage in, working in the policymaking process, can inhibit (intentional or unintentional) bridge-building. Energy transition organizations participate in the policy process to support their movement goals; they may take advantage of political opportunities and ally with whomever will most likely bring about success; meanwhile this work can have impacts on bridge-building. In the chapter I ask two questions. First, what activities form the core strategies that ETOs use for bridge-building? Then,

how do policy processes disrupt bridge-building activities? I discuss successful bridge-building strategies identified across ETOs, including focusing on commonalities while avoiding political issues; seeking nuanced understanding and people's personal experiences as opportunities for connection; and taking the time to listen and hear people's stories. I identify ways in which an ET movement organization's engagement in the policymaking process can inhibit bridge-building efforts. These include the policy-making process' time constraints and demands, its often binary and "zero-sum" nature, and the fact that it is often overly technical. This chapter highlights how the policymaking process itself can impact how social movement organizations respond to it and make decisions.

Chapter III addresses another part of the first research question identified above – specifically, how do energy transition movement organizations navigate bridge-building, and what influences their decisions about when to engage in bridge-building and with whom? This chapter highlights a "spatial mismatch" between the ET movement geography and that of the communities that are stakeholders in the energy system. I situate this mismatch within a dialectical analytical framework to examine potential implications of the dialectical tension. I ask the following questions: What kinds of bridging do ETOs engage in? How do ETOs prioritize bridging across geographic and social distance in a movement that is so rooted in the spatial development of the energy system? What factors affect these choices? I find that ETOs tend to prioritize bridging in one dimension or the other, social or geographic distance, but not both. I argue that there is a gap between what I call two-dimensional bridging across social and geographical space, and the bridge-building work that is occurring, setting in motion a dialectical conflict. I suggest that the few organizations that I observed engaging in two-dimensional bridging were more able to do so because of their particular place-based historical experiences.

This work highlights the importance of evaluating social movement processes, and particularly bridge-building, across both social and geographic dimensions.

In Chapter IV I focus primarily on the second research question identified above. Focusing on two communities that are stakeholders in the energy transition, I draw from ethnographic observations and embodied experiences as a participant-researcher in those spaces, to articulate what these spaces looked, sounded, and *felt* like. I observed differences in cultural norms and framing. Considering that members of these communities might also feel very different from each other, I investigate how these kinds of cultural differences may inhibit the ability of communities like these to identify similarities in their structural position relative to capital, which could otherwise form the grounds for solidaristic collective consciousness. Regarding these communities I ask the following questions: What similarities can be identified in the struggles these communities are facing? What are key differences in beliefs, norms and values in these sites? How might shifting or expanding the stories of struggle that are told in these communities lead to greater frame alignment and an opportunity for collaboration and coalition building? How might an expanded cultural toolkit (Swidler 1986) facilitate collaboration? Taking a prescriptive approach, I discuss the importance of attending to differences in cultural norms and habitus in bridge-building work, and I identify opportunity for solidaristic frame alignment in the form of what I call a community class consciousness.

I return to the research questions that motivated this work in Chapter V, where I draw conclusions that encompass insights gleaned from the three empirical chapters. In addition to discussing limitations of this project and promising directions for future research, I highlight several substantive themes. These center on how the energy transition movement may benefit from: 1) expanding the just transition frame to develop a broader and more inclusive collective

consciousness; 2) taking steps to “claim” the policy process; and 3) developing a network of “connected localism” to promote resilience and solidarity.

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Chapter II

The Policy Process and Bridge-Building in the Energy Transition Movement

Abstract

The various activities of social movement organizations can, at times, come into conflict with one another, with the carrying out of one inhibiting another. I examine how participation in the policymaking process can inhibit bridge-building activities in organizations involved in the clean energy transition (ETOs). I draw upon qualitive interviews with ETO leaders from across the United States, in conjunction with data derived from participant observation conducted with an energy transition campaign in Oregon. I describe four thematic clusters of important bridge-building activities that emerged from these data, and then identify three facets of the policy process that can inhibit these activities – the policy process' timing and cadence, its often binary nature, and the ways in which it is technical and professionalized. Findings point to the importance of attending to both intentional and unintentional social movement activities and how they can impact each other.

Social movements have important impacts outside of their stated advocacy goals. For example, they create an avenue for members of a community to participate in civil society and have a political voice (Ekman & Amna 2012; Sloam 2013). Social movements can also have important implications for mitigating or exacerbating political or ideological divides in a society (Coley, Raynes & Das 2020; Zajak & Haunss 2021) This can occur through entrenching existing divisions concerning the social movement (Zajak & Haunss 2021) or, potentially, reducing them. Since social movements spend substantial resources to overcome opposition, the circumstances under which social movement activities can reduce, or at least avoid contributing to, such opposition are worthy of investigation, even if doing so is not the movement's primary purpose.

While much attention in the social movements literature is paid to formal coalition-building, often related to specific policies and conducted between specific institutions (such as a labor organization and an environmental organization), another kind of bridge-building –

grassroots bridge-building – can have implications for politically contentious social movements. Many individuals who have a stake in the outcome of a social movement (and thus could become either its supporters or opponents) are unaffiliated with any organization, and may be more readily reachable through grassroots bridge-building efforts. I define grassroots bridge-building as bridge-building that happens at the individual level – either between two or more individuals, or between an organization and an individual. This can include mobilization activities such as recruitment and other outreach actions, but specifically refers to those that occur across divides.

Bridge-building can be an explicit goal of an organization (Coley 2014), and some grassroots social movement leaders and organizations have developed innovative strategies to engage in bridge-building work, such as trust-building and personal communication (Gawerc 2021; Harris & Young 2010; Mix 2011). Other times, bridge-building is simply an unintentional and unnoticed byproduct of other work in which a social movement organization (SMO) is engaged. Yet it is no less important in its impacts. Likewise, the obstacles or challenges to grassroots bridge-building can either be obvious to SMOs or go unnoticed.

I discuss here one of these obstacles – the policymaking process. Paying attention to and learning from the ways the policymaking process impacts SMO bridge-building work – whether intentional or unintentional – can further the academic understanding of policy work, bridge-building, and their interaction. To better understand policy-based obstacles to bridge-building in SMOs, I ask two questions: First, what activities form the core strategies that SMOs use for bridge-building? Then, how do policy processes disrupt bridge-building activities?

To address these questions, I identify several clusters of common grassroots bridge-building activities and then investigate mechanisms by which the policy process may generate tensions with these activities in a contested social movement. I explore these mechanisms in the

context of the energy transition movement, a complicated and contested movement whose breadth and strength could be expanded through bridge-building across diverse viewpoints. At the same time, effective transition to more responsible energy sources has been and must continue to be influenced by public policy at all levels of government. The lack of significant and comprehensive federal policy addressing the needs of stakeholder communities in the energy transition increases the importance of state and local policy (Haggerty et al 2018: 10). The energy transition movement is, therefore, an excellent case in which to examine the interaction between bridge-building and the policy process.

The analysis centers on data from 30 semi-structured interviews with staff members and leaders of energy transition organizations (ETOs) across the United States, supplemented by data from participant-observation with one energy transition campaign in Oregon conducted over the course of three years. I consider the ways that the policymaking process can foster an environment that inhibits certain bridge-building approaches. I ground this discussion in insights from social movement theory and the political and historical roots of energy transition politics. Findings suggest energy transition organizations that work in or adjacent to the policy process may encounter challenges to bridge-building due to the policy process' time constraints, binary or zero-sum character, and so-called "wonkiness". The outcome of bridge-building processes among different groups has implications on the extent to which individuals with different backgrounds and perspectives become involved in a social movement – and may also impact the success of the movement itself. I conclude the chapter by describing how this case highlights the importance of attending to unintended consequences of social processes in social movement studies.

Bridge Building and Policy Processes in Social Movement Organizations

Grassroots bridge-building occupies a theoretical space between coalition-building at the inter-organizational level, and recruitment, and in this section I present insights from each, followed by an examination of current research concerning social movement involvement in the policymaking process.

Grassroots Bridge-Building

Bridge-building remains under-studied despite its necessity for many SMOs. The need for bridge-building may be even more pronounced during particularly divisive historical moments, such as the present, with its acute rural-urban (Gimpel et al 2020), political (Pew Research Center 2024) and other divides. Bridge-building is a particular form of what I refer to as "connecting work", which consists of SMO activities such as recruitment, networking and mobilizing. Bridge-building is connecting work that is conducted across political, ideological or other social divides. This kind of connecting work generally requires certain strategies, outlined below, to overcome chasms in cultural or political norms or taken-for-granted assumptions that would otherwise hinder engagement between an individual and a SMO. For a social movement or SMO, the potential rewards of bridge-building include developing a broader base of support, reducing political opposition or undermining its power, and broadening the social movement's framing to attract future supporters (Gawerc 2020; Nicholls 2009: 85)

Most scholarship concerning bridge-building in social movements focuses on the levels of inter-organizational or inter-movement coalitions (e.g.: Beamish & Leubbers 2009; Daphi, Anderl & Deitelhoff 2022). A coalition is a collaboration between multiple SMOs to advance an interest or goal. Coalitions can either be temporary, focusing on a particular goal, or more

durable, focusing on broader social change. Most relevant to the energy transition movement, scholars have described coalitions between environmental activists and labor unions (Cook 2015; Mayer 2009; Obach 2002), as well as coalitions within the environmental movement itself (Hess 2014; Mix 2011). Factors leading to successful coalition formation include political environments unsupportive of the aims of either partner in a potential coalition (Obach 2002); resource constraints (Mayer et al 2010); and framing considerations (Allan & Hadden 2017; Giugni & Grasso 2015). Among other things, successful coalitions require partial goal alignment between organizations, trust-building, communication, high levels of personal interaction with potential coalition members, and the "use of existing social structures and institutions" (Mix 2011:186-187).

Little research demonstrates how readily theories describing bridge-building at the inter-organizational coalition level apply to grassroots bridge-building processes. Meyer and Corrigall-Brown (2005:327) make the comparison between an organization deciding to join a coalition and an individual deciding to join a social movement, saying both involve "an assessment of costs, benefits, and identity" (Mix 2011:179). However, this assessment may look different for individuals as compared to organizations. For example, while an organization that is considering joining a coalition may consider how doing so would impact its political success or access to financial or human resources (Mayer 2009; Obach 2002), determinants of individuals joining a social movement include factors such as biographical availability and whether the movement's motivational frames are relevant to them (Cross & Snow 2018).

Bridge-building at the individual level also has some theoretical similarities to the well-theorized process of recruitment in social movements. Both consist of reaching out to individuals to seek their engagement and/or support, but bridge-building entails doing so across divides.

Scholars have pointed toward the ways social movement organizations use frames (Snow, Vliegenthart & Ketelaars 2019), collective identities (Polletta & Jasper 2001), and narratives and ideologies to recruit new members and supporters. For example, organizations might deploy in their organizational discourse particular narratives or collective identities that have cultural relevance in the region in which they work. Organizations frame their issues and modify that framing strategically (Allen & Hadden 2017: 602) for different audiences where individuals may be expected to possess a particular habitus (Jasper & Polletta 2019: 69). These processes may be expected to be similar to those used by social movement organizations to engage in grassroots bridge-building, including but not limited to the context of recruitment.

Given that grassroots bridge-building occupies this theoretical space between social movement coalition-building and recruitment, some studies have begun to fill in the theoretical canvas of grassroots bridge-building and to identify key elements of successful bridging work at this scale. As suggested above, trust, personal communication and networking have been shown to be important in individual-level coalition building (Mix 2011). One study examined organizations whose primary goals was grassroots bridge-building across faiths and ethnicities in the U.K.'s non-profit sector and found that education, social events and dialogue were key grassroots bridge-building strategies (Harris & Young 2010).

Grassroots bridge-building is roughly similar to what Coley, Raynes & Das (2020) describe as bridge-building at the "meso level, when social movement organizations 'build bridges' between previously divided small groups or organizations." They review multiple processes that foster bridge-building, including creating welcoming spaces, practicing intentional inclusivity by considering who is not "at the table" and emphasizing shared beliefs or ideologies (Coley, Raynes & Das 2020). They also explored "bridge-burning" as a process opposite to

bridge-building. Coley, Raynes & Das (2020) conceptualize bridge-building as prosocial behavior and bridge-burning as antisocial social behavior (such as those engaged in by white supremacist or other hate groups or religious extremist groups) and provide examples of each category at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

Identifying societal circumstances that promote or limit organizations' bridge-building (or "bridge-burning") activities can expand understanding of how SMOs are influenced by various social contexts and processes. Many obstacles can inhibit a SMO from engaging in bridge-building. Bridge-building is labor for SMOs (Larson 2016), and in cases in which bridge-building is not a SMO's top priority, actions that may be conducive to bridging may not take place due to time and resource constraints. In recruitment efforts, a SMO's strategies may be targeted toward most likely supporters or those with some similarities – not those with whom an organization might find it most difficult to communicate or engage. Having too broad an area of focus may contribute to a lack of collective identity and too splintered a membership for an organization to be successful (Olzak & Johnson 2019: 180), so it may be expected that organizations limit their recruitment to individuals with similar identity attributes or interests. In situations in which an organization's primary goal is to increase membership or gain large numbers of supporters, bridge-building may only be an unintentional side-effect of recruitment. Yet it is not clear that these challenges outweigh potential benefits of bridging described above.

From an investigation of SMO bridging activities in this context we can see what happens when various social movement activities come into conflict with another, and the unintended consequences of these tensions. The present study considers how bridge-building can come into tension with one particular set of SMO activities – involvement in the policy process. While the impacts of prioritizing policy work over bridge-building may not be problematic at the

organizational level (i.e., the SMO achieves successful outcomes in its policy work, and gains some supporters and does not attempt to connect with any less likely supporters), the consequences on a more macro level, for the movement as a whole, are of interest.

Social Movement Organizations in the Policy Process

Social movements vary in the extent to which or the ways in which they engage with the policymaking process (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008). Broadly construed, involvement in the policy process can include lobbying, protests, and litigation (Birkland 2020) alongside other public participation avenues like submitting comments and contacting legislators. At the organizational level, some SMOs spend nearly all of their energies preparing for and working within the policy process, while the day-to-day work of other SMOs is far removed from the policymaking world. Moreover, a SMO's involvement in the policy process can change over time. SMOs may take advantage of political opportunities such as a sympathetic legislature, or the emergence of a particularly important bill that the organization would like to support. For those SMOs that do engage directly with the policymaking process, a vein of literature surrounding the "political process model" or political process theory reviews how political institutions shape social movements' strategies and tactics and how SMOs operate within a political context. The political process model of analyzing social movements assumes that SMOs seek access to institutional decision-making process and power (Pellow 2001).

However, political institutions are not the only possible target of a SMO's actions (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008); a single movement can have both political (policy-oriented) and cultural goals – or those oriented toward changing perceptions and culture in the broader society. Additionally, the choices SMOs make about strategies or tactics can be based on other factors

besides political expediency. For example, in some instances SMOs will prioritize "cultural or mobilization goals" at the expense of political wins (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008:79). Other priorities can include organizational identity (Bertels, Hoffman & DeJordy 2014; Polletta & Jasper 2001) or ideological grounds (Hond & de Bakker 2007).

Bearing these critiques and refinements of political process theory in mind, I nonetheless draw from this vein of social movement theory to the extent that it recognizes how engagement in the policy process can influence the strategies of SMOs and motivate or demand particular types of actions. This influence is particularly salient because of the power dynamics that SMOs engaging in the political process must navigate and the accompanying challenges to their participation and voice. Lievanos (2012) found that the strategies and concepts that are most effective at creating policy impacts are those that resonate with the state. The political process is also a political-economic process (Cini et al 2017:430) dominated by and intertwined with the hegemonic power of capital. The organizations and institutions more closely tied to capital make decisions and set the agenda and the rules of the debate (Lukes 2005). Consequently, SMOs must sometimes work within a discourse or process that is unfamiliar or undesirable. For example, forced to operate within a dominant discourse that was overly technocratic and unfamiliar, and within a process whose terms were set by government agencies or closely linked industries, SMOs described by Dodge (2009) would have preferred sharing stories and personal experiences instead of an overly linear or ordered communication (Dodge 2009: 228).

Scholars have identified some of the other ways that the political process shapes SMOs' actions within the policymaking arena. Environmental movement organizations in Oregon influence policymaking through "1) recruiting and positioning legislative champions on environmental committees, 2) building relationships with legislators and following the

conventions of the arena (interactional decorum, incremental timeline), and 3) shoring up legislator's commitments by framing climate policy as an 'economic engine'" (Lorenzen 2020: 375). To have influence in the state's policymaking process they must shape their activities around these priorities.

To successfully participate in this kind of power-imbalanced policy process SMOs need certain resources: "organizational skills, knowledge of political institutions and routines, and significant numbers of voters as a constituency" (Mix 2011:179). The process of obtaining these resources to ensure their participation and power can shape SMOs' actions outside the policy process too – including who they recruit and ally with. Grassroots groups may create coalitions – perhaps allying with an organization with greater knowledge of political institutions or particular skill sets – to bolster their power and gain effective access to the political system (Post 2015). This can require SMOs to engage in "ideology translation" (Snarr 2009) or ''frame translation'' to identify common interests and goals (Lievanos 2012: 484). For example, to gain the support of environmentalists, farmers started using certain language and shifted their focus (Kash 2008). This type of translation work can "place movement and countermovement actors in the awkward position of alienating their own values and constituents while making compromises in the policy process" (Lievanos 2012). How SMOs respond to the political-economic context of the policymaking process and how these choices are reflected in bridge-building activities merit investigation.

The Case of the U.S. Energy Transition Movement

To assess the ways in which the policy process influences bridge-building in a contested social movement I use as a case study the U.S. energy transition movement. Transition to clean

and renewable energy is crucial to addressing climate change, improving the overall health of the environment, and an important step toward energy, environmental and economic justice. Governments have begun to join activists in taking action on energy issues. The energy transition movement consists of multiple "arms". Defined in terms of issue area, one arm focuses on energy justice and environmental justice, while another focuses on clean energy infrastructure development. These arms align roughly with the environmental justice and socio-ecological discourses; and the techno-ecological optimism discourses, respectively, within the environmental movement (Hultgren 2018). A third arm of the ET movement focuses on community economic development, whose work often encompasses but is not primarily focused on environmental issues. ETOs engage in a range of strategic activities including policy advocacy, community organizing, mutual direct aid, education and training.

Due to historical political-economic and cultural factors, the energy transition movement faces sharp scrutiny and recalcitrant opposition in some parts of the country – and this tension is particularly poignant in areas with a historic economic dependence on fossil fuel extraction, processing or combustion. One important influence on opposition to energy transition is the directed campaign on the part of fossil fuel companies to foster such sentiments. These efforts have been part of a broader campaign mobilized by elements of the conservative movement in conjunction with fossil fuel companies and other large corporations to attack environmental science, and climate science in particular, (Jacques, Dunlap & Freeman 2008). In resource-dependent communities, extractive industries can additionally influence public opinion via power rooted in capture and ownership of the means of production (Fox 1999), control over the environmental conditions in which people live and work (Bell 2015; McNeil 2011), and a combination of constructed (Bell & York 2010) and/or real community economic dependence on

the industry. Regarding the energy transition movement, some fossil fuel workers feel that environmental groups are pushing to eliminate their jobs without caring for their fate (Robinson 2020), drawing from the "jobs vs. environment" discourse promoted by various industries, which claims that environmental protection and job protection are incompatible (Foster 1993; Foster 2019).

Larson (2016: 39) observes that notions of sameness and difference and of "us" and "them" are often socially constructed. In the energy transition, however, the chasms that stand to be bridged are at the same time material and cultural. Studies of bridging efforts specifically in the energy transition are sparse, but Feng (2020) discussed bridging between environmental activists and their opponents in a West Virginia coal mining community. They found that emphasizing positive place attachment and negative affective attachments to industry led to the deconstruction of "othered" identities between Appalachian coal miners and environmentalists (Feng 2020). However, individuals (and groups) manifest a multiplicity of identities (Larson 2016: 39) which require nuanced analysis. Thus, individuals may not map neatly into categories. How local energy transition movement organizations operate in this context remains largely unexamined.

Methods

To explore how SMOs' engagement in the policy process can impact their bridge-building activities I draw from data collected from interviews with staff members and leaders from SMOs involved in the energy transition. I also draw from data collected during participant observation in an energy transition movement in Oregon. These methods provided complementary and fine-grained insights. For the interviews, I spoke with staff members of

energy transition organizations across the United States about the challenges and successes they have encountered in their bridge-building work. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 staff members or leaders of 20 energy transition organizations located in 13 states.

The ETOs I talked to varied in terms of area of focus within the energy transition movement (i.e.: carbon reduction, community development, environmental justice, etc.), and the degrees to which they focused on bridge-building and involvement in the policy process. In terms of bridge-building, organizations ranged from bridging being a substantial part of the organization's work to it not being an overly recognized component of its work. The organizations had in common that none had bridge-building as the organization's primary focus, allowing me to observe bridge-building as a secondary or indirect process. This enabled me to investigate impacts of engagement with the policy process on bridge-building that might otherwise go unnoticed.

At the same time, the organizations had varying levels of engagement with the policy process, ranging from little involvement to primarily involved in policy work. For example, some organizations were more involved with community economic development and were not directly involved in the policymaking process. Staff members I talked to from other organizations described how their work with their organizations involved policy work on a daily basis. This range allowed me to observe the ways in which the policy process can impact organizations' capacities to engage in bridging activities. In fact, this pattern was an emergent finding generated by analysis of these data, rather than a question I had identified prior to data collection.

Organizations were located in regions with varying histories and experiences with fossil fuel extraction, processing and combustion, and the accompanying economic, ecological and

social consequences. Participants too had various roles in their organizations including community organizers, policy advocates, and communications managers. I thus gathered information from individual organizers embedded in their organizational context. Like any member of an organization, the organizers I spoke with were situated at various structural points within their organizations and related to me their knowledge of their organization from their unique vantage point and positionality. It may be expected that a communications manager might have a different perspective on their organization than an executive director, or a grassroots organizer.

The variation in these elements (organizational area of focus within the ET movement, degree of organizational focus on both bridging and policy, and the role variability of the staff members with whom I spoke) all constrain the extent to which these data can be used to directly compare between organizations within this study, as these factors are not held constant for comparison. Yet these interviews are not intended to be representative. Rather, I consider them cases that can be examined for elucidation of potential patterns and processes. The data collected represents a variety of geographic, political, environmental, and organizational contexts. I use the dataset as a whole to observe a wide swathe of organizational practices from different vantage points across the ET movement. I zoom in on some of these practices and perspectives to try to identify patterns and trends across the movement – perhaps identifying some worthy of future research specifically designed to control rigorously for each of the aforementioned factors.

For these interviews, recruitment consisted of emails to individual staff members' email addresses, as listed on organizations' websites, or generic organization email addresses were used if necessary. The overall response rate was about 50%. About seventy percent of participants presented as women, a figure relatively consistent with the gender distribution in the

environmental organizing field. Only about twenty percent of participants were identified by me as people of color. This figure roughly aligns with the racial/ethnic ratios of many energy transition organizations located in rural fossil fuel extraction regions. It is, however, far below the ratio for some others, particularly organizations focusing on extraction in tribal regions, as well as many organizations located in communities located further down the commodity chain (near power plants, for example). While opposition to energy transition, a major subject of this study, is concentrated in largely white fossil fuel extraction regions, it is certainly not exclusively found there, and the relative lack of voices of people of color is a limitation of this study.

The majority of participants in this study spoke with me on Zoom, although phone and in-person interviews were conducted when preferred by the participant. Interview duration ranged from just under thirty minutes to over two hours. I audio recorded all interviews and transcribed them using Sonix software, and I used Atlas.ti for data analysis.

I identified emergent themes using a modified abductive reasoning approach (Timmermans & Tavory 2012). This method can be compared with grounded theory methodology (Charmaz & Belgrave 2012) in that instead of taking an entirely inductive theoretical approach, it advocates for a hybrid inductive-deductive approach. Its founders acknowledge that much sociological qualitative analysis is in fact not conducted entirely inductively and that an abductive approach better captures the process that many scholars engage in in practice. In my case, I approached my analysis process with some preliminary thoughts about themes that I had heard during data collection, as well as some ideas concerning the theoretical concepts that could be useful. Nonetheless, I wanted to allow other insights to emerge as well. I engaged in an iterative process of open coding and focused coding (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 2011), interspersed with reference to what was appearing to be relevant literature.

I supplemented interview-derived data with insights from participant-observation with an energy transition campaign in Oregon – the Oregon Clean Energy Opportunity campaign over the course of three years. As a result of constraints due to COVID at the time, the campaign took place almost entirely virtually using Zoom meetings. I participated in three parts of that campaign. The first part consisted of a five-session Energy Justice Leadership Institute (EJLI) (Part I) that took place between December 2020 and January 2021, which was primarily focused on teaching grassroots participants about the energy system. Part II of EJLI was called the Grassroots Action Teams, which took place weekly between January and July 2021. The Grassroots Action Teams component was focused on continuing to educate grassroots participants, but this time the content was more heavily focused on training for grassroots participation in the legislative process, both generally and specifically concerning three OCEO-promoted bills. After EJLI Part II I continued participation in the campaign's HB 2021 Community Advocates group, which was a smaller group that advised on implementation of the bills, from the perspectives of community members. This took place biweekly between October 2022 and October 2023. I also attended two Oregon Citizens' Utility Board (CUB) conferences to which I was invited as an OCEO participant in October 2022 and October 2023. At these conferences I was able to meet with fellow EJLI participants and leaders face-to-face, build camaraderie, and discuss energy-related issues in person.

I participated actively in sessions including contributing to conversations both in small and large group settings and asking questions. I did, however, wait until other participants had offered their input first, to reduce my influence on others' comments as much as I could. I also participated in practice exercises and actual participation in OCEO campaign events including providing testimony on a piece of legislation for a Public Utility Commission meeting and

lobbying a representative to support one of the campaign's proposed bills. Data from participant observation activities are from either written field notes, review of meetings presentations and recordings, and general observations and insights gained from the experience of participating in the campaign. Throughout my participation in EJLI and Community Advocates I was able to learn not only the topics that were discussed in these meetings, but the ways the meetings were structured, how organizers prioritized different topics and demands, including how engagement with the policy process influenced their efforts. I was then able to combine these experiential and observational data with data from interviews with OCEO leaders, to learn about the campaign process from multiple perspectives.

In the following section, I use data from a wide breadth of organizational types and vantage points, including those involved in OCEO, to identify themes in successful bridge-building strategies or activities that emerged across the interviews. Then, taking together these interview and observational data, I identify ways in which engagement in the policy process appeared to inhibit those kinds of bridging activities.

Findings

I discuss my results in two parts. In the first part I present findings concerning the dimensions of bridge-building that emerged as important in the energy transition movement, based on data from the organizations I studied. I identify four thematically organized clusters of these bridging activities. In the second part I identify characteristics of the policy process or ETOs' involvement in it that made bridge-building work more challenging or less likely. I present findings concerning three characteristics: the policy process' time constraints; its frequently binary or "zero-sum" nature; and its technical nature or "wonkiness".

Dimensions of Bridge-Building

Social movement organizations engage in activities that can bridge divides – political, racial, economic or otherwise. They do so either intentionally – as a major or minor organizational priority – or unintentionally, as a byproduct of an activity, and some SMOs, due to their organization's mission, issue focus, or tactics, do so more than others. Here I term "bridging activities" those SMO activities that work across these divides. These generally tend to reduce differences of opinion or tensions between individuals about a social movement's goals or ideologies, or between an individual and an organization about the organization's goals or ideologies.

Four thematic clusters emerged in the analysis of bridging activities engaged in by ET leaders in these data. The first cluster relates to focusing on apolitical issues and searching for common ground, and I refer to this cluster as "Commonalities, not Politics". The second cluster, which I title "Keeping it Real (and Nuanced)", is focused on a willingness to see nuance in issues and people's perspectives. The third cluster, called "Getting Personal", centers on connecting with people by starting where they are, physically, mentally and ideologically, making engagement accessible, and drawing from people's lived experience. The fourth cluster, "Taking Time", focuses on taking the time to listen, understand and develop trust and relationships. These clusters are organized to highlight tensions between these actions and the three characteristics of the policymaking process discussed later (binary, "wonky", and time-sensitive).

Bridge-Building: Commonalities, not Politics

ETO leaders described the importance of avoiding politicized topics and finding common ground. For some ETO leaders an apolitical approach was an explicit priority – Tim, an organizer in West Virginia, explained "I think there's a reason why we've been successful for ten years is because we – we haven't even – we don't even talk politics. Both sides agree on one thing: jobs are good for people. So how can we get good jobs for people." Lucille, an organizer from rural Ohio similarly avoided a politicized approach, stating:

> …politics are just the worst. You know, I think we're all really blinded by them and misled by them. And we mislead each other when we refer to one another by some bullshit political [label] of ya know oh, you're a Trump person, whatever. I just - I truly can't stand that and worry that such attitudes, you know, especially around clean energy - I hate if I'm being pigeonholed into someone who…see[s] this as the only solution. And I just - I've really tried to break down those walls as best I can and not create division because in the long run we all need to secure a healthier future and a safer future and a cleaner future. This is one way. It's not the only way. It's just one way.

This organizer sees political labels as "walls" and sees herself as open to multiple energy transition solutions, not only those that have gained partisan support.

Instead of focusing on politicized topics, ETO leaders who successfully engage in bridging search for issues with which the person and the organization have common concerns and common ground. Ilana, an organizer from the Oregon Clean Energy Opportunity Campaign suggested bridging divides by "go[ing] back to the values of the things we want. You know, we want living wages, right? We want access to fresh water. We want, you know, so like, how are we going into those pieces and centering that the safety of our communities, things like that…at the end of the day, these policies aren't just meant for certain people, right? They're meant to benefit all communities, with an emphasis on prioritizing those who need it the most." Ilana

implies that many of the ideals pursued by the OCEO campaign could actually appeal to a broader swathe of people than the ET movement typically targets.

Another OCEO campaign leader, Frankie, offers an example of seeing connections that have the possibility of spanning political divides: “I think at the end of the day, people want what we call in the just transition framework buen vivir - living well, to live well… And in more layman's terms or something that I think Americans would be more familiar with it's, you know, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Buen vivir is a term from Spanish used not infrequently in the energy and environmental justice movement, and it is associated with a holistic and comprehensive just transition, including protections for economic, social and environmental well being, particularly for historically marginalized and “frontline” communities. It refers not only to social well being but also to living in harmony with nature (Kauffman & Martin 2014:40). It aligns well with the Green New Deal that has historically been embraced by many on the political farther-left; the Green New Deal, in turn, has been “accused” by many on the right of being a socialist plan. Indeed, the concept of buen vivir has been embraced by some foreign governments as a contrast to the ideology of conventional development in which there is established a false choice between development and harmony with natural processes (Kauffman & Martin 2014:41). Yet Frankie recognizes a conceptual overlap between the term buen vivir and the very “American” values of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In identifying this link, this organizer opens an ideological door that could invite interest from some on the political right for whom such language may sound worth working to protect.

Bridge-Building: Keeping it Real (and Nuanced)

Working across divides can require ETO organizers to see nuance in people and ideas. For example, opportunities can arise in which people with whom organizers may disagree on many topics could yet be supportive of an organization's efforts for a very particular reason. Clay, an organizer in Colorado, relates an illustrative anecdote: "…people are complicated…I met one gentleman and he was very [politically] conservative, you know, in just about all of his attitudes. But he wanted to fight oil and gas tooth and nail because of his own personal experience with that, and he believes that the extraction near his home was responsible for his wife's cancer. And so that - that is what motivated him…That's kind of a break from the typical wall of political ideology, right?" This organizer saw value in connecting with the politically conservative gentleman on the issues of fighting oil and gas, despite differences of opinion on many other issues.

Recognizing that individuals' perspectives are complicated can allow for bridge-building despite areas of disagreement – but this can require organizers to step outside their comfort zones and welcome a more ideologically diverse supporter base. Ilana from OCEO observed, "when people feel a sense of belonging, it really allows for just more like confident participation and for more, um, yeah, like I think those are, it could be sometimes complicated of like, oh, well, people believe a certain thing then maybe they shouldn't be invited to these spaces or things like that." She explains how she takes a slightly different approach, "I think well there's like, I'm a gray person and so I'm not a very like, yes and no." Being able to recognize common interests alongside differences requires attention to nuance – an appreciation that people are multifaceted and can simultaneously hold views that to others appear in tension with each other – and it invites opportunities for connection.

This kind of appreciation of nuance can also help organizers recognize the complicated nature of the issues the energy transition movement tackles, whose facets reflect the complexity of the social, economic and physical interconnectedness of the energy system. Tim from West Virginia told me that the political climate in his region is nuanced and complicated because politicians on both sides have let residents down. Past experiences have also fostered a complicated perspective among communities in other regions, requiring a nuanced approach. Ilana from OCEO told me, **"…**Energy systems have harmed communities before. And so there's just like a lot of nuance, I think, that communities are expecting from these conversations. And I think that piece sometimes is missing." She appreciates the importance of "just talking and just being real about the pros and cons about everything about any energy system, whether it's renewable or dirty or whatever."

She describes how this work can be challenging for ETO organizers to consider all the complicated pros and cons of different energy sources, and that organizers may tend to avoid doing so to avoid frustration and conflict within the movement. "I think about these things and it's, it gets hard, it gets like overwhelming. And I'm just like, Why can't we just be real? Like, okay, we get mad for a while." She sees value in engaging with those with the details and with different opinions even if it is uncomfortable. All energy sources – renewable and nonrenewable – have pros and cons, she believes, and it is the real nuances of those pros and cons that communities' concerns and interests lie. Conversations that are too black and white may lose communities' support or interest of people for whom those nuances are important.

Bridge-Building: Getting Personal

Organizations also build bridges, or the foundations of bridges, when they start where people are and work to make advocacy more accessible, concrete and relevant to people's daily lives. As noted above, if substantial obstacles inhibit engagement in a social movement or if the movement seems unrelated to someone's lived experience, only those most committed and strongly in support of the work will join. Lowering barriers to entry and making the energy transition space more accessible, relevant and and welcoming allows for a wider variety of supporters and a broader, more diverse movement.

To make energy transition issues feel less abstract and more relevant ETO leaders can use people's personal experiences as a bridge to their involvement in the organization. Making an issue more relevant often requires active engagement and outreach. As Tonya, an organizer in New York City mentions, "there's tons of this evidence that, you know, if you're dealing with like a lower income community where people are working multiple jobs or English is not their first language, it's a lot harder for them to participate actively in politics." She describes her priority of "trying to connect the issue to people's lives to bring them into it" and getting people to "feel agitated and […] feel the desire to actually get involved for their own self gain... [I]f you feel really bought into [a] movement, that's that's where movements grow and last." On the other hand, people may have a more difficult time finding agreement with an organization whose goals they perceive to be unrelated to their own daily lives.

Issues must be understandable and relevant, and spaces must be welcoming of participation for people to stay involved in social movement work. When describing her ideas for improving participant retention in an energy justice training for community members Ilana from OCEO said, "And then I think another piece also on the retention was to like simplify the content

more,…make it more culturally competent,…have more space for like fun and joy." Such an approach contrasts with the professional, technical and "wonky" energy transition policymaking space that will be described below. Ilana told me that she sees a need to create spaces that are genuinely open to two-way conversations between organizational leadership and community members instead of a one-way flow of pre-determined information and content from ETO leaders. Moreover, she critiqued the technical focus of many ET policy conversations, "It's really a compassionate conversation and a caring conversation that's not completely jumping right into like, well, is this economically feasible? Like, is this financially feasible?...those conversations could come later around different ideas…And I think being able to strip some of that like professionalism or kind of like front that people have to have." Instead of technical, abstract conversations Ilana advocates for starting with compassionate, human-centered conversations about people's concrete concerns.

In contentious social movements like the ET movement, making an issue less abstract and more concrete can be particularly helpful in increasing relevance to people's lives. Energy transition organization leaders working on successful grassroots engagement and bridge-building efforts on contentious issues told me it can be more effective to gain an individual's support regarding a specific local target (i.e.: a particular power plant) instead of its corresponding broader societal issue (coal or natural gas production in general) which often carries a political connotation. Molly, an organizer from Montana cites this as one reason for her success in organizing in a coal mining region: "…my language is not like coal is bad, but it's like [the company's name] is a bad company or…they can't get away with what they're doing right now and not like, 'we need to hold all coal companies accountable.' Like, I think keeping it…specific...." Framed in a more locationally specific manner, a problem can be interpreted as a

failing of a particular company, or an instance of corruption, which several ETO leaders noted as a unifying issue. People whose livelihoods or communities rely on fossil fuel production may be more willing to find fault with a specific company than an entire industry, not least because the latter would implicitly attack the safety, value or morality of their own work or the industry that supports their community.

Being attuned to an invidual's personal values and starting a conversation from where people are was a frequently-cited helpful strategy. Matt, an organizer in a conservative environmental organization describes how his organization starts with an issue a person already cares about and builds a bridge to their organization's priorities from there. "For a lot of people on the, you know, a lot of our center-right members, we end up having to find the what is the issue that they care about and how does that tie into climate. So the example I'll give is we were speaking to one guy in Oklahoma, pretty conservative state, pretty conservative student. And he said, you know, honestly, I don't care about the environment. My top issue is immigration. And we got to make that connection of climate migration. Right? Like immigration, not all of it, but a big reason why people are migrating to the US is because [in] Central [and] South America some climates are just becoming inhabitable, right, so making that connection to him that if you care about immigration, there's actually a climate component to it." Matt explains that even issues that people think they are uninterested in can become relevant to them if organizers can link the issues to an issue about which they are passionate – even a politicized one.

Similarly, organizers may choose to frame issues in ways that align with their audience's perspectives. Rachel, a leader of an organization in rural Illinois, explained that when speaking in a rural coal community, she will not even talk about climate change but instead talk about energy transition in other contexts. In this case, she prioritizes bridge-building over

comprehensive discussion of the full picture of her beliefs and priorities. Participants described how frames like cost-effectiveness of an energy project or the ways in which it would make an individual or a community more self-sufficient often worked well with people whose political views did not align with the typical energy transition project supporter. Tim from West Virginia talked about how he would depoliticize a topic like recycling, which in some communities is viewed as a leftist priority, broadening the scope of the issue's relevance with a "whole conversation" about how something like that is not a political issue but actually benefits the economy of the community in numerous ways.

Bridge-Building: Taking Time to Listen and Build Trust

In order to find areas of common ground and to be able to know people's concerns and make them feel welcome – to start from where they are – ETO leaders must take the time to listen to people's stories and develop trust and relationships. These processes, participants informed me, take time. Alicia, an organizer in Kentucky, describes the process as involving "a lot of listening to people in communities about what they want to see and what they want to do. And then we try to work with them to make that possible." Through this process organizations take a people-centered approach in which individuals' or a community's priorities guide the organizational goals – instead of fitting people into an approach guided by a particular policy.

Theresa from Oregon put it simply when she recommended, "lead by listening and start by listening." The work of building a broader movement involves, in part, actively creating space for previously excluded voices. Theresa described how meetings tended to go in a coalition she was part of, in the white-dominated energy transition space in Oregon: "And so it's pretty common that the first people that kind of like jump in with questions or ideas are the folks that

are more knowledgeable and usually like white. And if you're like a person of color joining that - or a person of color, a person from a marginalized background that maybe had not had lots of experience organizing, you may be a bit shy to kind of just jump in because it can be a bit overwhelming." Here she notes that domiannt voices may be the first to jump in to a conversation. Moving more slowly could create space to hear ideas from a wider range of voices – racially, socioeconomically, ideologically, and otherwise.

Listening and dialogue was described as particularly important to bridging political divides. Tim from West Virginia explained to me:

> There's been so much talking about transition. And not talking with people in the transition. And so I think there's always gonna be a massive political divide, and it's gonna keep getting wider, and the harder people push for transition and the push out of coal, the harder people are gonna push back, even if ya know we're down to twelve jobs left in coal [in his community], people are still gonna have that stick to fight over [and they will say] 'I'm never gonna forget the time that you laid off my dad, I'm never gonna forget the time that you shut down my community', even though it was ten years ago, um, even if we have a perfect transition on paper, it's it's not going to heal the country, heal the world like we need it to to actually get us moving forward.

He described the importance of understanding people's stories:

> I think there's a lot of sympathy but there's not a lot of time made for empathy, for folks ya know actually having the conversations one on one and I think that just that could make such a massive difference to where we're not writing grandiose definitions of what a justtransition is because we know that the conversation we had with John Doe, coal miner, I knowwhat it is now, I know what he's saying it is, I know what he's telling me, I know what I'm telling him, we understand each other and we can just actually make something happen.

Tim describes the importance of one-on-one conversations between people who are actually stakeholders in the ET because they create greater mutual understanding and allow for the development of empathy across stakeholders.

Likewise, Kham, an organizer in an environmental justice (EJ) community in California told me about how intentional listening helped to build trust in a situation in which there was

initially lack of understanding between his EJ organization and workers at the local refinery. Refinery workers lamented to him that, due in part to the EJ organization's activism, the corporation operating the local refinery had halted a project, causing workers to lose wages and not be able to afford their Thanksgiving turkey. The EJ organizer said to them, "'Wait a minute. You're talking about turkey…the food on the table…it's [less than] a hundred dollars. Please. Don't compare turkey to my community who…we have to bury someone in my community because of the suffering of the impact'" of the refinery on people's health. Aside from the tragic loss of life, the emotional suffering and trauma, the funeral services also costed people in the community tens of thousands of dollars. He continued, "And so, when I said that and they, they…kind of like, stopped" and understood his point. Of the refinery workers, he thinks, "We have to build a trust relationship…we have to communicate, we have to talk about that…If you and I, we work together you can keep your turkey and I [keep it so that] not too many people [are dying]" in his community.

Trust and relationships, ETO leaders told me again and again, are essential. Kham summarized: "I think for me personally…across from different ethnic groups or across from different sectors I think it always comes down to trust and relationship. That is the key ingredient…" Similarly, Tim from West Virginia told me, "Take it from me that…you could have the best solution to everyone's problem, but – if it's coming from the wrong place or from the wrong base or from the wrong person even, it's not gonna be received…just because again that trust isn't there. There's so much political exploitation that people just aren't ready to take it in. As Arjun, an organizer from Oregon, noted, "my job is just - building that trust and building that relationship."

Listening to and understanding people's stories, and building relationships and trust, takes time. Bill, an organizer from North Carolina, described his relationship building work: "Yeah, it is time consuming. It's hard. It's scary sometimes, but that's the best way to kind of go about things." In stating the advice she would give to others organizing in her state of Kentucky, Alicia said: "be in it, for a long time because that's what it [will] take. You know, [my organization] has been around for, like I said, [decades]. Other organizations have been around for 50 or more, and we are still on this cycle of relationship building and trust building." Particularly in social movements in which the economic, ecological and social stakes are high, and the issues have become politicized, taking that time is central. As Lucille, an organizer from a community in rural Ohio in which some people are skeptical about some new renewable energy development, put it: "We work at the speed of trust." She describes mentoring an intern at her organization and "…trying to help him understand the context, the reason for having the approach that we have, the approach of just really talking to people, learning what they need, you know, it's really it's slow work and it's, you know, time intensive and it doesn't happen fast." This contrasted with the intern's intitial mindset of trying to "accomplish" or effectuate energy transition in that community as rapidly as possible.

Characteristics of the Policy Process

The practice of taking time to listen and build understanding and trust is one bridging strategy that can be inhibited by participation in the policy process. In the second half of this section I discuss three ways in which the policy process can constrain bridging activities. After discussing policy process timelines and norms, I describe next how it is often bluntly binary and thought of as a zero-sum game, before turning lastly to the "wonky" nature of the policy world.

The Policy Process: Time

The timeline of the policy process is structured primarily around legislative sessions – typically "long sessions" and "short sessions," when lawmakers are actively working on reviewing and passing legislation or are engaged in "rulemaking" processes to develop the details of previously passed legislation. Organizations that engage in the policy process must shape their own work accordingly. Amy, an organizer from Colorado, described how her work matches the tempo of the legislative season. "So we have our legislative campaigns during the legislative session, which is right now, it's January through May. So things have just I just came from a very, very hectic meeting about all the bills that have already been introduced…But so we have legislative campaigns during the legislative sessions… And then off season, so not during the legislative session, we are kept busy still with our regulatory work." Similarly, Arjun from Oregon framed his work in terms of legislative sessions: "I'd say between November and December [I was] mainly prepping for legislative bills for the legislative short session, which ran between February and March…So we - myself personally, [I] worked on two specific bills…" These organizers, whose roles involved direct engagement with the policymaking process, defined their work almost entirely in terms of legislative sessions.

Organizations that strive to engage individuals in the policy process through grassroots organization and advocacy must navigate this kind of scheduling. The Energy Justice Leadership Institute (EJLI) and HB 2021 Community Advocates, components of the OCEO campaign, were designed such that they aligned temporally with the Oregon legislative session for the purpose of collecting participant feedback on priorities and contributing summarized feedback as part of the coalition's contribution to the legislative process. That meant that certain events (like collecting

feedback from participants) had to be done during certain Community Advocates meetings, which sometimes displaced exploration of other topics. During my involvement, most meetings ran short on time. This often meant that comments that participants who brought up more extended or more involved comments had to be (politely) told that there simply was not time in today's agenda for that topic, or it was tabled until the end of the meeting "if we have time." Additionally, it also meant that some documents (ex: an initial draft of community engagement goals that were to be developed by the Advocates group) were not able to be vetted through participants and were drafted and submitted to be used in the legislative process by leaders. One EJLI organizer, Leah, reflected on the meetings' organization.

> …There was a lot of week to week planning…because this was happening at the same time as the legislative campaign. It was like extremely busy. There wasn't a lot of time to, to like plan ahead…I think it was largely like, okay, what is important for this week?...I feel like if we had more time, we were able to…build out a curriculum a bit more…But I think also that those types of things just happen in campaigns where you're like putting out fires constantly.

Leah illustrated how time constraints from the legislative timeline can result in lack of capacity to devote to other organizational priorities – in this case planning for grassroots engagement and training activities.

The public participation process itself also includes elements that conflict with the temporal environments conducive to bridge-building efforts. In public hearings, for example, community members' input is generally limited to a minute or so. Maria, a staff member at an environmental justice organization in California, noted: "…there's always a hearing where you have to give public comment and you have to say what [the elected officials] already know over and over and over you and you get like 30 seconds or a minute to speak." Other common public engagement tactics often have length limits (ex: letters to the editor) or are inherently space-limited (ex: postcards to legislators).

The severe time constraints of a meeting or a rushed opportunity for input, and the rapid pace, determined by the policy process itself, may be harmful to the diverse communities that organizations seek to engage, let alone stifle bridge-building between such communities across the movement. Theresa, an organizer from Oregon, observed the rushed nature of her organization's engagement with the local policy process and discussed what she described as a potentially White-centric and exclusionary pace:

> One of the things that [my organization] does call for is an urgent and swift shift we want. The Council, they just had their first work session on electrification this past Wednesday…we wanted them to agree to move forward with ordinance language [instead of just agreeing to have another work session]…And that did not happen. We're very disappointed. But I'm just thinking about what are the consequences of pushing this with this sense of urgency…Because if I'm not mistaken. The - among the Councilors that said they needed another work session before they can think about moving forward to draft ordinance was [name of Councilor], who is a Black man. And so I was wondering just what, you know, what is going through his mind. Because, of course, you want to engage people of color and want them to support this. And if he's saying, slow down, I need more time, like, why maybe there's - what are we missing? And so, so yeah, just thinking about that and the sense of urgency and what are the unintended consequences of moving to fast?

Theresa expanded on her concerns as she explained, "…when you think about characteristics of white supremacy, a sense of urgency falls underneath that." Here she draws upon knowledge she has of the theorizing around white supremacy and suggests that a rushed timeframe can be directly counterproductive to engaging with certain communities whose preferred timelines of engagement may not align with that of the policy process.

The Policy Process: Binary, Zero-Sum and Lacking Nuance

Work within the policy process not only operates according to a particular, rigid, Western timeline, it also must be conducted in tandem with the political needs and will of policymakers. In fact, as Maria from California lamented when it comes to policy work, "It's all political."

Because the US political system is so polarized, the close link between partisan politics and the policy process can mean that advocacy work can develop a binary character and lose attention to important nuances.

Policy advocates rely on policymakers to help develop policy concepts, introduce and sponsor legislation, and be the "champion" of a bill within the legislature. Leah from OCEO described the relationships with various legislators that campaign members took great efforts to establish and maintain to facilitate campaign success. In the case of OCEO, the campaign's policy lead worked closely with a legislator who was formerly a leader of one of the key campaign organizations, and the pair coordinated support from other legislators. For their part, policymakers are subject to financial incentives from industry entities that oppose energy transition advocates' work, at the same time that they also navigate political pressures in a polarized U.S. political landscape. Participants described how they watched politicians "flip-flop" on policies at the last minute based on party loyalty, political expediency or changing donor bases. Bill from North Carolina explained: "There's a lot of stuff that we've noticed, like, we'll talk to [an] elected official, you normally, you know, on paper, you wouldn't think they would care or work with us, but we talked to them, get them to meet people and they're on board...but then…at some point down the road…it's almost kind of like this, like, I don't know, like party line kind of a thing where they realize like somebody higher up than then tells them to knock it off." He gives this example: "There was a county commissioner who was like super important for putting up like county level resistance and when she decided to kind of move up into a higher elected official position, she did a 180. There's just a lot of like money involved that seems to be part of it." Even if legislators have more nuanced views on an issue, perhaps developed through conversations with community members and energy justice advocates, the

legislators or their political parties may feel that these nuances will not be reflected in the votes to support or not support a bill. Forced to take a stance, legislators may walk back previously expressed support for community advocates – reducing lawmaker backing for their efforts and reducing the complexity of the conversation about the bill to a binary choice.

Participants were keenly aware of the influence of industry in polarizing issues, noting that issues are "manipulated, and they want to make it, you know, environmentalists against the energy companies," in the words of Josh, an organizer in New Mexico. Vince, an organizer in California, echoed these ideas, *"*And so the employer tried to frame it as jobs versus the environment, of course, which is the framing they always use." Laura, an organizer from the Navajo Nation bluntly described the Tribal Nation's government as similar to the U.S. in this regard: "I think yeah, it's the same as the U.S. you know politicians for the U.S. government, they can take donations, they can take gifts. And there's no limit to how much. So a lot of [politicians] who are huge supporters of fossil fuel industries… they're not supporters because they actually support the industry. They're supporters because somebody from the industry is paying them off."

Due in part to a political environment that includes a well-defined and often well-funded opposition much advocacy work is expressed in a one-sided manner, despite the existence of opportunities for more balanced public discussion (at public meetings, in public comments). During my participation with EJLI and Community Advocates the strategies that were used by the campaign generally expressed full support for the measures. When the complicated issue of environmental and social health and justice in sourcing of solar panel raw materials was brought up, for example, its importance as a concern was validated, but was not followed up on. These

kinds of questions and nuanced conversations complicated and put at risk winning the objective, which was to win those policies.

For example, I learned that, among others, Tribal community members who were participating stakeholders in the OCEO campaign, would have liked to have seen more discussion of the complicated issue of lithium mining than was welcomed in these meetings. Ilana from OCEO provided insight on why this happens. “You know, you're kind of taught to not repeat what opponents are saying or just kind of like strategic messaging and things like that, to build the new, it's like, how are we shifting to use less energy?” She told me she still asks herself the question, “How do we have these conversations that are nuanced and that, like, we’re able to just be real about concerns that we have around any energy system without feeling like, ‘Oh we’re just giving more fuel to the opponents.’” Ilana described how the other organization she works for encounters tension with the policy process because it “doesn’t have like a yes or no stance, you know, we have like, well, what's the circumstance? Where is that being built? What communities will that impact? You know, like we have mostly questions and like trying to get the whole story behind every single particular project, um, which could be really hard when legislation comes up or when things come up.And it's kind of like a general, like, do you support offshore wind or not?” She contrasts the nuanced understanding that her organization prioritizes with the legislative process that requires a “yes or no” answer regarding whether organizations support or do not support an issue or a particular piece of legislation.

In part because of the existence of opposition, energy transition policy advocates can also inadvertently develop a binary thought process and approach to their work. Policy work is often discussed in language such as “win/loss” and “good/bad”. Amy, from a “grasstops” policy-oriented organization in Colorado expressed frustration with the binary view that she observes

some people to have in her line of policy work. “I think a lot of folks who do this kind of work get very pigeonholed into a very black and white view of what we're doing is right. And everyone who opposes it is wrong…there are a lot of people, I think, who don't put as much focus or as much importance on sort of the lived experience of these policies. They're really looking at the bigger picture being like global carbon emissions.” In this view, any policy that works toward climate change objectives, such as reducing carbon emissions, is “good” and any opposition to such a policy is “bad”. She discusses how this binary perspective can be so focused on “winning” a policy objective in support of a broad societal goal, that it can promote inattention to specifics – the specific needs of an affected community, or potential avenues to engage or build bridges to new movement supporters.

The Policy Process:“Wonky”

Energy transition is an area of public policy that can be particularly abstract, as it often pertains to large-scale energy generation and transmission systems, carbon emissions and other topics that can appear removed from people’s day-to-day lives. Some ETO leaders describe the energy policy world as “wonky” – referring to “energy policy wonks” or technically savvy professionals in the energy policy field who tend to use jargon and acronyms and focus on technical aspects of energy transition (and thereby often omit the justice aspects that those ETO leaders prioritized). Other interview participants involved in policy work apologized to me for using “so many acronyms” or, as Amy from Colorado said, for “naming so many [government] offices that you have no idea what they are. I’m sorry it’s hard to talk about my work without doing that.”

This wonky policymaking environment is suitable for industry because companies can hire staff whose full-time job it is to understand the technical details of, for example, levelized cost of energy for industrial versus distributed solar installations, or the energy loss calculation of various generation and transmission systems. They can hire full-time policy analysts, energy experts, organizers and lobbyists who are completely comfortable operating in a "wonky" energy policy environment.

In contrast, energy transition and energy justice advocates can feel out of place, afraid, and unable to contribute in the same environment. Leah from OCEO shared her experiences as part of a "policy table" that consisted of 50-60 leaders from advocacy organizations, labor groups, industry and utility companies. In her words, "it was very wonky, it was really, really wonky." She elaborated, "It was just a lot of really wonky climate policy, legislative people." She described how certain participants in those meetings made the advocacy leaders feel out of place. In responding to my inquiry of which participants these were, she recalled, "I think largely…[representatives from the] utilities…industry associations, developers…sometimes the Big Greens…[I] think all of that made it so that…we just didn't know where to plug in. It was very intimidating. But yeah it was utility folks and industry folks who were there…I don't necessarily think we were outnumbered by them in any way, but that definitely contributed to it feeling a little like, 'Oh, this is really complicated. And these are – and these are the people who work at the utilities whose job it is to do this really complicated thing,' you know." In addition to the technical nature of these conversations, Leah highlights the professionalization of the energy policy process.

Such a professionalized, technical environment can be nearly inaccessible for many community members to be a part of. First, meetings (including some public meetings) are often

organized during typical work hours to accommodate paid staffers, and are thus inaccessible to many working people. When I participated in OCEO's legislative lobbying, I was the only group member (in addition to two group leaders) in attendance, in part due to fact that my schedule, as a graduate student, was far more flexible than those of most other members who worked full-time jobs. The group leaders could attend, as doing so was part of their full-time job, but members generally could not.

Additionally, many community members lack knowledge of the technical aspects of energy policy, and sometimes even a working understanding of the basics of the legislative process. Kham from California observed of his primarily first-generation migrant community, "Our communities don't understand for example how the bill becomes a law in the state of California, right?...So it's very important for our community to understand the process and to participate in that and to involve, engage in the process." In the communities he works with, residents lack both basic policy process knowledge, and more issue-specific knowledge. Often, few community members have the capacity, knowledge, or insider experience to engage directly in the policy process, and "community-led" campaigns sometimes are less so in reality. In the OCEO campaign, much policy work was conducted by one of the campaign's policy leads, as well as a hired lobbyist. Melissa, an organizer with the OCEO campaign noted , "We were really lucky to have Hannah who has a background in the energy advocacy and energy field and energy justice." Hannah had experience in the policymaking system and had fostered relationships in the legislature.

Moreover, wonky, technical, and abstract energy policy often seems unrelated to people's lived experiences and is therefore deprioritized by many community members.

> I think…what's really challenging is just like some of these environmental issues do feel really abstract for people," explained Tonya from New York. She continued, "And…it is

> a little bit harder, even though you can show [people] countless studies that…link air pollution to health effects…It's, you know, that challenge of like, okay, if…your daughter has asthma and you're dealing with hospital bills…you don't have the time or the energy right now to go and advocate to make brand new buildings all electric to improve the air quality in ten to fifteen years.

She describes how "policy-heavy" bills are accompanied by "a messaging challenge of how do you make this bill relate to somebody? Because if you just talk about funding mechanisms and you know, funding formulas and how NYSERDA [New York's state energy agency] spends money…nobody's going to understand what that is in relation to themselves."

High barriers to entry and lack of perceived relevance of policies limit the pool of community members who are involved to those most interested and/or available, and thus reduces opportities to build capacity and relationships across differences of opinion. This can weaken the outcome of campaigns. As Taryn, an organizer from Pennsylvania describes the bill her organization was pushing for:

> And so we're really just fighting to make sure that we pass it this year…and also making sure that there is like real community power behind it and not just an internal advocacy…between, you know, people who get paid to do advocacy and elected officials, which I find a lot of public, a lot of energy focused policy, kind of because it can get so policy heavy and so wonky and so technical, it really loses that public momentum. And then that I think really hurts it in the long run because there's no leverage for when things don't go right.

A larger, broader base of support provides greater stability and strength for the movement when it meets opposition or roadblocks.

Discussion

Taken together, these findings indicate three facets of the policy process that stand in tension with four clusters of important bridge-building activities. The rigid, externally determined timeline of the policy process challenges ETOs' abilities to take the time necessary to

listen to potential allies' concerns and build trust to bridge divides. Moreover, a rapid pace can limit who is able to or feels comfortable contributing to a conversation. The often binary and black-and-white nature of the policy process limits ETOs' perceived ability to consider the nuances of policy alternatives or ideas pertaining to energy transition. In particular, ETO leaders felt compelled to stake out their position as distinct from that of the opposition to avoid unintentionally lending the latter any support. Lastly, the "wonky", abstract and professionalized nature of the policy process made it less accessible and relevant for grassroots members. The juxtaposition of the policy process with bridging activities allows for unique observations that move the literature forward in several areas.

First, these findings expand insights into the unintended effects of social movement activities, or unintentional impacts that social movements generate for individuals, groups or society in the course of their work. Specifically, they expand upon the work of Coley, Raynes & Das (2020), who examined prosocial "bridge-building" and antisocial "bridge-burning" activities among organizations at micro, meso and macro levels. While Coley, Raynes & Das (2020) examined extreme examples of antisocial outcomes (such as those conducted by white supremacist or religious extremist groups), I adapt their framework to a much milder, and perhaps less visible, social phenomenon – when a normal activity of generally prosocial SMOs – involvement in the policy process – leads to the possibility of antisocial outcomes via tensions with bridge-building activities.

Put another way, unlike the organizations studied by Coley, Raynes & Das (2020), the energy transition organizations I examined were engaged in generally prosocial work, which could have some antisocial implications. (Following prior literature (e.g., Penner et al 2005) I apply a more expansive definition of prosocial and antisocial behavior than did the prior authors,

including not just behavior relating to bridging divides but also any behavior that is expressive of connection to or concern for other humans or society as a whole.) For example, the OCEO campaign resulted in a great deal of prosocial activity, including community-building and alliance formation within environmental justice communities, and advocacy for community members and the environment, even while it may have also had antisocial consequences in alienating some potential members whose interests were not reflected in the group's discussions. Thus, while the linking of bridge-building and bridge-burning to the concepts of prosocial and antisocial social movement activities is relevant in my study, my findings also challenge the binary conceptualization of prosocial and antisocial outcomes.

The bridge-building activities described in my study aligned well overall with those identified in prior literature. First, studies have suggested that successful bridging requires a nuanced understanding of people and issues and a focus on areas of common ground. For example, in their study of non-profit organizations whose aim it was to build bridges across ethnic- or faith-based divides, Harris and Young (2010: 11) argued, "It was clear that successful bridge-building was dependent not only on mutual respect but also quite sophisticated understanding of customs and sensibilities and a willingness to ignore points of contention." My findings add that single-issue alliances in which an organization identifies a single issue on which an individual agrees with an organization, can be a useful strategy. Previous scholars have also cited the importance of building trust to bridge divides (Diani 2023; Gawerc 2021; Staggenborn 2010), and fostering interactions over time to allow for these to occur (Gawerc 2021; Van Dyke & Amos 2017). Among my findings, unique contributions to bridge-building literature include the importance of starting from people's own experiences and focusing on

specific, concrete topics rather than those that are broader or more abstract, in order to reduce the likelihood of encountering entrenched ideologies.

Additionally, the present study provides insight into the question, posed by Coley, Raynes & Das (2020) as well as other scholars, concerning the circumstances that encourage bridge-building. Specifically, these findings explore one particular circumstance by which social movements' bridge-building activities can be constrained – their involvement in the policy process. Examination of the mechanisms by which the three facets of the policy process were found to be in tension with the requirements of bridge-building contributes to theory-building surrounding this question.

First, the bridge-building strategy of seeking common ground and nuanced understanding conflicts with the polarized, politicized and adversarial reality of the policy process. Rather, social movement participation in the policy process generally consists of taking a side and aligning with a politically constrained legislative sponsor (Lorenzen 2020). Prior research has indicated that this may be particularly important for small grassroots organizations to do early in the policy process, in the ideation phase, when they can most effectively exert power (Ganz & Soule 2019). Social movement actors, aware of clear opposition in policy work, may take explicit actions to subvert counter-coalition efforts to destroy particular policies (Patashnik 2019) or to ensure their own coalition's success. The data presented here also revealed a specific mechanism by which framing and messaging strategies SMOs use at an organizational level in a contentious policy process can solidify "sides" and reduce opportunity for bridging at the individual level. Namely, when the OCEO leader reported reluctance to "repeat what the opponent is saying" or make any statements that could be construed as supporting "the opponent", it also likely had the effect of alienating potential individual supporters of the

campaign and overlooking potential avenues for compromise and successful policy development. This rigid messaging approach designed to win the policy goal appears to come at the expense of nuanced discussion about benefits and drawbacks of particular policy ideas.

The conceptualization of the policy process as wonky, professionalized and abstract also supports and moves forward prior literature. Social movement organizations must navigate multiple manifestations of discursive power in policymaking spaces (Dodge 2009). Dodge (2009) argues that technical-rational discourses common in policy spaces can limit conceptualizations of problems and possible solutions. As cited previously, Dodge observes that the structure of a deliberative process can reduce participation of some groups, namely those who would have preferred a deliberative model less linear and more appropriate for storytelling (Dodge 2009: 228). Data from the present study demonstrate that "wonky", technocratic and professionalized policymaking spaces that demand specific types of knowledge and abstracted discourse may also inhibit bridge-building. This is because such spaces reduce opportunities for policymaking to start where people are and center on concrete issues that are relevant to people's daily lives. In doing so they limit the pool of interested participants, reducing opportunities to bring more differently-minded people into the conversation. Mix (2011: 188) discusses the importance of shared place-based experience in building coalitions among people she talked to as part of her study. The present findings suggest that concrete, specific issues may be easier for advocates to build bridges toward because community members can experience impacts for themselves and because they may not be as politically polarized as their more abstract analogues around which much policymaking often centers.

Lastly, this study found that the timing of the policy process leaves little time for deep listening and building the trust and relationships essential for bridge-building. It has been

recognized previously that tensions exist between the urgency of energy policy needs (Delina & Sovacool 2018) and procedural justice (inclusivity in public participation), which takes time (Cha & Pastor 2022; Ciplet & Harrison 2020). Cha and Pastor (2022: 6) recognize that "the time needed to integrate inclusive participation and build broad-based support, particularly among historically excluded stakeholders, can be seen as a hinderance to rapid emissions reduction [52,53]. While inclusive processes take time, as many of our participants stated, power building requires broad-based mobilization. In turn, broad-based mobilization necessitates inclusive processes where relationships are built and sustained." Bridge-building requires such broad-based mobilization and focuses on achieving that across axes of difference.

Thus, the present study invites an expansion of the justice lens to incorporate the concept of bridge-building. It also adds to this conversation analysis of the particular steps of the policy process that present time constraints (legislative sessions and their timelines, public hearings) and how those constraints translated in this study into reduced opportunities for bridge-building. For example, OCEO campaign leaders were less able to create an open, inclusive space to listen and engage with participants' own concerns because their work was tied to the pace of legislative sessions. Additionally, in some instances in the OCEO campaign, the combination of time constraints and the "wonky" and inaccessible nature of the policymaking process resulted in documents or statements that were put forward as "grassroots input" being crafted and guided primarily by OCEO leadership, with only minimal input from the campaign's grassroots participants.

More generally, this study also contributes to conversations around political process theory and its critiques (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008). Multiple actors have power and agency in the policy process alongside the state (ex.: industry, social movement organizations, etc.)

(Armstrong & Bernstein 2008). My findings suggest the importance of considering how the policymaking process itself – as part of the social structure – may be an important factor in how social movements respond to it and make decisions. Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) alluded to the point that existing power structures can operate and be replicated through the policy process. Powerful state and capital interests can shape the form and content of the discursive space (Dodge 2009) through multiple dimensions of power (Lukes 2005). When dealing with contentious social movements like the energy transition, industry interests have great incentive to discourage bridge-building through hegemonic control of the policy process. Yet the policy process is not immutable (Armstrong & Bernstein 2008). Dodge (2009) recalls Dryzek's (1997) observation that policy problems are constructed and contingent upon particular worldviews or discourses. Recognizing that the policy process itself may inhibit bridge-building can invite questions regarding how it can be modified.

Conclusion

I have argued that several characteristics of the policy process exist in tension with practices or attributes conducive to bridge-building. In some cases I have provided examples of situations in which these tensions manifested for my study participants; while in other cases I simply highlighted a tension's theoretical existence based on the synthesis of my findings concerning both the policy process and bridge-building. More detailed exploration of each of the categories of tensions I observed as well as others warrant further research.

It should be acknowledged that the policy process is only one of many sources of challenges to bridge-building activities in social movements. For example, funding timescales also provide externally generated timelines by which organizations must abide (Harris & Young

2010:10), and which could also constrain the time available to engage in bridge-building. The constant need to prioritize financial and human resources in often budget-strapped non-profits is another possible reason why organizations often prioritize building support among community members who are already likely allies, rather than seeking nuanced understanding and common ground with unlikely allies. Geographic and cultural constraints may also limit or guide the direction of bridge-building efforts and are explored in the chapters that follow.

In the energy transition movement, greater awareness of the ways that the policy process may constrain bridge-building opportunities can help ETOs take proactive steps to mitigate or alleviate those constraints, should they choose to do so. To avoid calling upon those groups and communities already marginalized in the policy process to perform the labor of bridge-building (Larson 2016), more systemic changes to the policy system could be considered that would simultaneously invite greater opportunities for bridge-building and expanded democratic participation. The policy process could be slowed down, perhaps with longer legislative sessions that allow for more meaningful relationship-building and conversations across interest groups or between constituents and legislators. In such a structure, policy ideas may flow to legislators more directly from hearing community needs. Governments seeking community engagement in policymaking could sponsor welcoming, accessible spaces led by community-based organizations, not government officials or energy "wonks", to identify community needs related to energy and brainstorm nascent policy ideas. Structuring more opportunities for bridging into the policy process could result in policies that enjoy broader and more bipartisan support, making the work of both social movement leaders and policymakers themselves easier and less contentious.

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Chapter III

Navigating the Energy Transition Terrain: Building Bridges Across Social and Geographic Space

Abstract

Some social movements span broad geographic distances; others span ideological divides; still others do both. The energy transition movement away from fossil fuels and toward renewables in the United States exemplifies the latter, as it is spatially rooted in the development of fossil fuel infrastructure and social structures across the country, as well as embedded in cultural and political contention. Prior research provides insights about how social and physical distances impact social relations in social movements, but few studies address how organizations asked to bridge both social and physical distances at the same time prioritize this work. I examine how and why organizations prioritize social and geographical bridging work. I draw from data from interviews with leaders in energy transition organizations across the country, as well as participant observation with an energy transition movement in Oregon. Findings suggest that most organizations work either across social or geographic distance but not both simultaneously, while a few manage to do so. These findings reveal a tension between bridging work that is needed to optimize movement breadth and success, and the bridging work that is occurring. They suggest the importance of studying bridging in a social movement across both social and physical space – particularly in movements like the energy transition that span disparate social and physical spaces.

Social movements often work across social or geographic distance – each of which present novel challenges. Best practices for working across *social* distance, or social differences, have frequently suggested that geographically local, time-intensive, face-to-face interactions help build trust and relationships (Mix 2011: 188; Nicholls, Miller & Beaumont 2013:4). Conversely, *geographically* distant coalitions or outreach work are commonly pursued with organizations or individuals sharing either social characteristics or interest in the movement.

The energy transition (ET) movement that advocates shifting from nonrenewable toward renewable energy sources occupies a broad social and geographic landscape. Building a more

diverse and comprehensive movement would require bridging across both social and geographic divides simultaneously. Often, however, bridging work in the movement occurs either geographically locally, as in cases of community-based labor-environmental alliances, or socially locally, as in the case of regional or national fossil fuel phaseout coalitions. Yet in a contentious social movement an over-emphasis on the geographically or socially local could serve to strengthen both existing ties and existing divides (Nicholls, Miller & Beaumont 2013; Zajak & Haunss 2022), which could potentially be damaging to the movement. Thus, the bridging that is needed in the movement may not commonly occur, and the bridging that does occur may instigate further conflict for the movement to navigate.

Analyses of bridge-building work in the energy transition movement are relatively rare. Organizations' work to build alliances or coalitions, make contacts, recruit or mobilize supporters I refer to collectively as "connecting work". When organizations work across differences or divides in the course of their connecting work, they engage in "bridging work", and the circumstances under which organizations prioritize bridging in their connecting work remains poorly understood. Social network theory offers helpful insights concerning movements operating across geographic and social space; yet, little theorizing addresses how organizations might best work across difference in both dimensions at once.

In this chapter I ask the following questions: What kinds of bridging occurs as ET organizations (ETOs) engage in their connecting work? How do ETOs prioritize bridging across geographic and social distance in a movement that is so rooted in the spatial development of the energy system? What factors affect these choices?

I use social movement theory and social network theory to examine how ETOs bridge geographical and social space in this contentious social movement. I draw from interviews with

30 organizers from 20 ETOs located in 13 states across the country, and I pair these data with those from over 75 hours of participant-observation conducted over the course of three years with an ET campaign in Oregon, to provide fine-grained insights into why organizations engage in various kinds of bridging work. Findings suggest that most ETOs prioritize bridging over either social or geographic space, while a small subset demonstrated engagement in bridging work across both dimensions. When considered in the political and cultural context of the energy transition, these findings reveal a contradiction that can be usefully analyzed with a spatial dialectical approach. Applying this framework, I identify a potential resolution of the contradiction, or dialectical synthesis. Collectively, these findings demonstrate the importance of conducting analysis of bridging work along multiple dimensions. More broadly, as I describe in the conclusion, this work contributes to understanding how the spatiality of a social movement and its material underpinnings can impact the bridging needs and tendencies of the movement and thereby its dynamics and trajectory.

Social and Geographic Distance in Networks and Social Movements

To better understand how social movement organizations generally and ETOs specifically engage in and prioritize bridging work, we must understand the impacts of social and physical distance on social relationships in the context of social movements. Social network theory and social movement theory offer helpful insights to situate this discussion.

Social Distance and Homophily

Sociological analyses of the impact of distance on the formation or maintenance of connections evaluate both social distance and geographic or physical distance. Social distance

refers to the relative social positions of two or more actors (or organizations) in social space and was conceptualized in the early 1900s (Poole 1927). Social space, sometimes referred to as "Blau-space" (McPherson and Ranger-Moore 1991) is multidimensional; that is, an actor's social position can be conceptualized as existing in multidimensional space, with each dimension representing a facet of their social life such as race/ethnicity, class, gender, life course stage, and social background (Hipp & Perrin 2007:1), and cultural values and attitudes (Hipp & Perrin 2007: 4). For example, an individual may be Latina, middle-upper class, a woman, college-educated, and a strong supporter of rights for people with disabilities, with each of these aspects of her life locating her social position along intersecting axes.

Social network theorists have learned that people more similar to, or less socially distant from, each other are more likely to form social ties, all else being equal – the theory of homophily. In other words, people are likely to have more in common with close acquaintances than with strangers (Light & Moody 2020). Homophily may operate because of the influence of connected people on each other or because of role constraints due to network position (Light & Moody 2020). Ijima and Kamada (2017: 656) argue that social distance "represents the level or amount of obstacles to agents' relations, so agents form links with others who are nearby." This may be because social distance between people can reduce overlap in their attitudes and their likelihood of developing a shared group identity, and can increase differences in their roles (Hipp & Perrin 2007:3).

Social distance has implications on how people interact with and perceive each other. It impacts "the salience of certain social characteristics that form both an awareness of similarity with others based on the characteristic, and an awareness of difference with others not sharing the characteristic" (Hipp & Perrin 2007:1). Social distance between groups operates similarly

and can affect both how comfortable members of one group are interacting with members of another group, and the decisions that group members make (Mathews & Matlock 2011:4).

Geographic Distance and Propinquity

Like social distance, geographic or physical distance has been demonstrated to impact the likelihood of two social actors forming connections, as well as the kind of connections that are formed. Social network theorists call this the propinquity principle – wherein people closer to each other physically or geographically are more likely to form bonds, all else being equal. Studies demonstrated this principle in the 1950s, controlling for social distance effects by studying a homogeneous population, and later studies have confirmed this general rule (Cabrera & Najarian 2013:4; Hipp & Perrin 2007:1; Neal 2022). Geographic distance limits the people with whom an actor interacts in their daily life to those nearby. Even within a particular community or location, micro-level distances matter too. For example, city planners often try to create cityscapes that promote social ties (Hipp & Perrin 2007), and the spatial organization of a meeting place can affect interaction in civil society organizations (Baggetta, Fulton & Caplan 2022).

Qualitatively, ties that occur over greater geographic distance tend to be of a particular kind, specifically "weak ties", or looser connections such as those between acquaintances or "brokers" (Granovetter 1973; Nicholls 2009). Strong ties, on the other hand, are deeper connections between closer relations, which are more readily formed when actors are geographically near and have greater frequency of bonding experiences (Nicholls, Miller & Beaumont 2013). Geographic distance is often accompanied by differences with regard to *place*.

Social and Geographic Distance and Place

The concept of place encompasses multiple facets of a physical (or non-physical, such as in virtual spaces) location where people live and interact. These facets include physical or material components of place, such as the natural and built environment, and cultural components such as demographics, place-based identities, ideologies common to a place, heritage and traditions (Lyon 2014: 1011). Differences in social space sometimes correlate with differences in geographic space; social and geographic distance are distinct but interrelated concepts.

Place impacts people's identities, perspectives and values, and in turn their social distance. The relationships between place and these latter concepts are, however, not a direct or linear outcome of geographic distance. For example, geographic distance interacts with political ideology to influence perspectives on unconventional oil/gas development (Clarke et al 2016). Rather, identities, perspectives, values, and social distance arise from complicated and nuanced social processes that link people and places. For example, the differing cultural connections to fossil fuels of three communities with different legacies of fossil fuel and renewable energy in their regions impacted community members' perspectives on energy transition policies (Crowe & Li 2020). A place becomes more than its physicality and infrastructure; it becomes meaning and identity for the people who live and interact there. Coal communities often develop a community economic identity (Bell & York 2010) tied to coal mining, even despite an absence of actual material dependence on that industry. Similarly, residents of a community near a chemical plant in Wales described the plant in terms of a sense of community. Shrimp fishers in the Louisiana bayou and their community members developed a place-based cultural identity derived from shrimp fishing in that landscape and region (Harrison 2012: 71, 79-83).

The resulting interrelated social and geographic distances between two social actors in different places impact the likelihood and type of connection formation that may occur between the actors. Two conceptions of place provide a framework in which to discuss these processes. Nicholls (2009: 79) describes the territorial notion of place as viewing places as "distinct territorial units" wherein social interactions occur and whose characteristics mediate how social positions translate to perspectives and viewpoints. In this view of place, interactions anchored in a particular geographic location yield greater solidarity and strong ties. In the relational view of place, on the other hand, scholars emphasize that particular locations are not comprised of people with homogeneous experiences, viewpoints and solidarity; rather they see places as spaces where contingent interactions occur between diverse actors dynamically and ephemerally. In this environment, ties may be weaker; weak ties are more likely to results in the sharing of new information (Light & Moody 2020) and the bringing together of potential allies with diverse viewpoints.

The ways in which strong and weak ties can also be thought of as "bridging ties" or "bonding ties" (Cabrera & Najarian 2013) help to illustrate how social ties exist in social space in addition to geographic space. Bonding ties "connect individuals from similar social or geographical spheres and tend to reinforce homogeneity" and create cohesion and trust within a group (Cabrera & Najarian 2013). Bridging ties "connect individuals from different social or geographical spheres" and create trust at the community level (Cabrera & Najarian 2013:3). Ties that serve as bridging ties along one dimension of social space may bond along another and vice versa (Briggs 2003).

Putnam (2000: 23) described bonding social capital (generated from bonding ties) as "a kind of sociological superglue" and bridging social capital (from bridging ties) as "a sociological

WD-40". Excessive superglue in particular social or geographical places can create social or geographical "cliques" that can cause cleavages between in-groups and out-groups (Nicholls 2009: 80). In contentious social movements, bridging social capital, and bridging ties, may be particularly important in creating cohesion across the movement and with stakeholders external to it.

Social and Geographic Distance in Social Movements

Scholarship in social movements and social networks has demonstrated the importance of geographically local movement activity in social movement bridging work such as recruiting or retaining supporters and building coalitions. To encourage supporters or coalition members to dedicate their time and resources, social movements may need to develop strong emotional ties or shared identities between individuals or member groups and the movement (Nicholls 2009:83). Frequent interactions afforded by geographical proximity can facilitate the development of shared interpretations of common experiences (Nicholls, Miller & Beaumont 2013) or perspectives (Gawerc 2021) and can "charge newly established connections with strong emotional power" (Pierce 2011:57). Additionally, shared geographic location creates more opportunities for shared experiences, as well as greater possibilities of mutually known individuals, who can serve as brokers between disparate groups (Nicholls 2009). Inhabiting a common geographic place allows for more frequent interactions that can generate "contact points" (Sennett 1971) that "whittle away at the cognitive boundaries separating self and other (Nicholls 2009: 85). Proximity also reduces the costs associated with forging new alliances, allowing resource-poor organizations greater opportunity to engage in such work (Nicholls 2009: 83).

At the same time, in social movements, local places can be "strung together" over geographic space through mechanisms such as "brokers", conferences or gatherings, or, increasingly, through the internet and social media (Nicholls 2009) (or, more recently, video conferencing). These kinds of opportunities can provide the "contact points" discussed by Sennett (1971). When connections are made over geographic or social distance, they can allow the flow of information, resources and political support across those distances. These connections "provide activists with a greater opportunity to draw on resources and legitimacy beyond their traditional base of support" (Nicholls 2009:85). They also help social movements to avoid the pitfalls of in-group/out-group cleavages and "militant particularism" that can arise with over-localization and prevent the expansion of the movement (Nicholls 2009: 80).

As with geographic distance, decreased social distance within a social network (such as a social movement) can lead to denser networks and stronger ties. Homophily leads to connection, and to connections that are less likely to sever (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001). However, social movement theory suggests the benefits of expanding diversity of membership across demographics to people who don't normally get involved in activism. For example, historically, the environmental movement leadership consisted primarily of middle-upper class white men (while the environmental justice movement is largely led by women of color), and calls have been made both in the academic literature and within the movement itself to diversify the environmental movement.

Yet the literature also points to several reasons social movement organizations might find it difficult to connect with socially distant others. Surmounting these challenges requires a great deal of time and resources, which are often in short supply among social movement organizations. Organizations may experience challenges constructing a collective identity across

diverse supporters or reaching agreements on strategies and framings (Gawerc 2020). Power inequalities between socially distant members of a movement can also hinder diverse coalition-building (Gawerc 2020). Nicholls (2009:86) summarizes well the dilemma: "Broadening the geographical and social base of a political insurgency necessarily introduces a wide range of *diverse* actors into the mix (della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Tarrow and McAdam 2005). These diverse actors have different ideological traditions, organizational logics and cognitive frames for assessing grievances. While broadening the alliance provides activists with access to new resources and sources of legitimacy, these networks are somewhat fragile because of the radically diverse traditions, ideologies and organisations involved." He continues to highlight the complicating factor of geographic distance: "The *distance* between these organisations compounds the problems of diversity because it reduces the *time* needed for diverse actors to meet, share ideas and engage in common actions. This means that there are fewer opportunities for forging the norms, trust and cognitive frames that help diverse actors overcome destabilising differences." Social movement organizations must balance conflicting goals and needs and weigh the various costs and benefits associated with putting resources toward engagement with various people and communities along both axes of social and geographical distance.

The foregoing discussions of social distance and geographic distance, of strong and weak ties, and of bridging and bonding ties often take place along a single dimension – geographic or social distance. When both dimensions are considered, one of them is often defined quite narrowly. Nicholls (2009) discusses weak ties formed over geographic distance he is referring to weak ties between people and organizations *within the movement* – who occupy like locations in at least one dimension of social space – interest in that movement. Likewise, bridging ties, as discussed by Cabrera and Najarian (2013), refer to ties that span social distance within a

particular community. This observation holds even when considering the authors' proposed concept of spatial bridging ties – these refer to bridging ties occurring between disparate spaces within a community (Cabrera & Najarian 2013) – thus not spanning vast geographic distances. The U.S. energy transition movement and its stakeholders, as will be illustrated next, occupy wide-ranging space along both geographic and social dimensions. Moreover, due to the contested nature of the movement, bridging ties are of interest not just within the movement but between existing members and potential new supporters or even individuals and communities who currently lie completely outside of the energy transition movement. Evaluating how energy transition organizations forge connections in this context can help push forward theory to consider how organizations navigate both the social and geographic distance dimensions broadly and simultaneously.

Spatial Histories of Fossil Fuels and Energy Transition

Spatiality in social movements has long been attended to by spatial and network scholars (see, for example, Routledge (2013) and Nicholls (2009)). The energy transition movement can be referred to as a sociospatial movement because of how space shapes the interactions between different entities within (or adjacent to) the movement (Halvorsen et al 2019: 6; Nicholls 2009). Structural approaches to understanding the concept of space are often rooted in concepts of territory, place, scale and networks – or the TPSN framework (Halvorsen 2017: 448; Miller 2016: 286). Social movement activities that occur at a particular scale (ex: local, regional, national, global) can effect outcomes at broader or narrower scales. Cultural or policy norms developed in a local community in Ecuador, for example, become norms at the global scale through the involvement of the local community in the national policymaking arena (Kauffman

& Martin 2014). Similarly, norms pertaining to energy transition from all perspectives travel both up and down geographic scales, from local to national or international and back, as social movement organizations navigate their political, cultural, physical and economic environments.

Fossil fuel infrastructure in the United States developed where it did and when it did as a result of interrelated environmental, social, political and economic factors. While extraction necessarily only occurs where deposits of oil, coal, natural gas or other fuels are located, the selection of specific locations for exploration and development depends on both economic feasibility of access and extraction, and factors such as extraction-friendly policy environments (O'Rourke and Connelly 2003:611) or regulatory capture (Fox 1999) and local acquiescence and/or vulnerability (Malin & DeMaster 2016). Distribution infrastructure such as rail lines may take advantage of existing lines or involve new construction. Determination of routes of new infrastructure such as pipelines is often dependent on companies identifying perceived paths of least (community) resistance - communities where political will or capacity to resist such siting is perceived to be weakest – often in areas that have already seen historic disinvestment. Siting of facilities for processing and combustion of fossil fuels are influenced by similar factors as well as the economic implications of physical constraints (i.e.: the mass and transportability of a particular fuel, limitations on distance that can be traveled by electricity before it becomes economically unproductive). The result is a largely nonrandom distribution of fossil fuel infrastructure across the United States, and patterns in the location of various kinds of infrastructure. These patterns have implications on the social dynamics of the energy transition movement, the groups that participate in it and the ways in which they do so.

For example, the spatial distribution of individuals that oppose transition away from fossil fuels is dependent on (though not identical to) the distribution of communities that host or

have hosted fossil fuel extraction or processing facilities. Within the movement, fossil fuel processing infrastructure in a community can serve as a rallying point and galvanizing force for energy transition movement organizations nearby. More broadly, the coalitions and networks created as part of the movement have a spatial element (i.e. statewide coalitions to implement an energy policy; community-based organizations to shut down a local power plant; regional networks in Appalachia or Western coal country to aid in the transition away from coal).

The ET movement is, in part, an outgrowth of the environmental movement, the environmental and climate justice movements, and labor-environment relations; the interrelated histories of each precedent movement are illustrative in understanding the spatial evolution of the ET movement. The environmental movement in the United States has its roots in the largely white, middle-class, anti-toxics movements spurred by nuclear disasters and toxic waste exposures in a small number of middle-class communities. After becoming more mainstream in the 1970s it began to focus on more global issues in the 1980s. Around that time a movement opposing environmental racism, led largely by Black community and faith leaders, as well as indigenous leaders and other people of color (BIPOC), emerged and was to grow into the environmental justice movement. While the environmental movement developed in middle-class communities, the environmental justice movement was largely concentrated in lower-income urban communities of color. Many instances of environmental racism that this movement was organized to fight were the direct result of the installation of toxic fossil fuel infrastructure, such as power plants, refineries, and transport facilities, disproportionately located in low-income areas, communities of color, and urban areas. Of course, fossil fuel infrastructure is also installed in rural areas, but a variety factors including a lack of financial and human resources, geographical constraints, countermovement political and economic forces, and other cultural and

ideological patterns have decreased the tendency for rural communities to host resistance to fossil fuel development (Ellis et al 2016) or environmental movements (although the ones that do have developed innovative approaches that provide important insights and outcomes and will be discussed later).

Also in the 1980s a branch of the environmental movement began to devote its attention to the issue of natural resource protection. Natural resources such as forests were largely concentrated in rural areas, near rural communities whose real or perceived economic identities were dependent on the extraction and processing of those resources. The Timber Wars in the Pacific Northwest set off a decades-long history of conflict and set the stage for continued tensions between the interests of resource extraction workers and those of environmental groups.

Communities engaged with the fossil fuel system across the different points in the system have faced disinvestment and various combinations of economic and environmental consequences. The histories of development of the U.S. energy system and the U.S. energy transition movement, when taken together, reveal a series of tensions or "spatial mismatches".

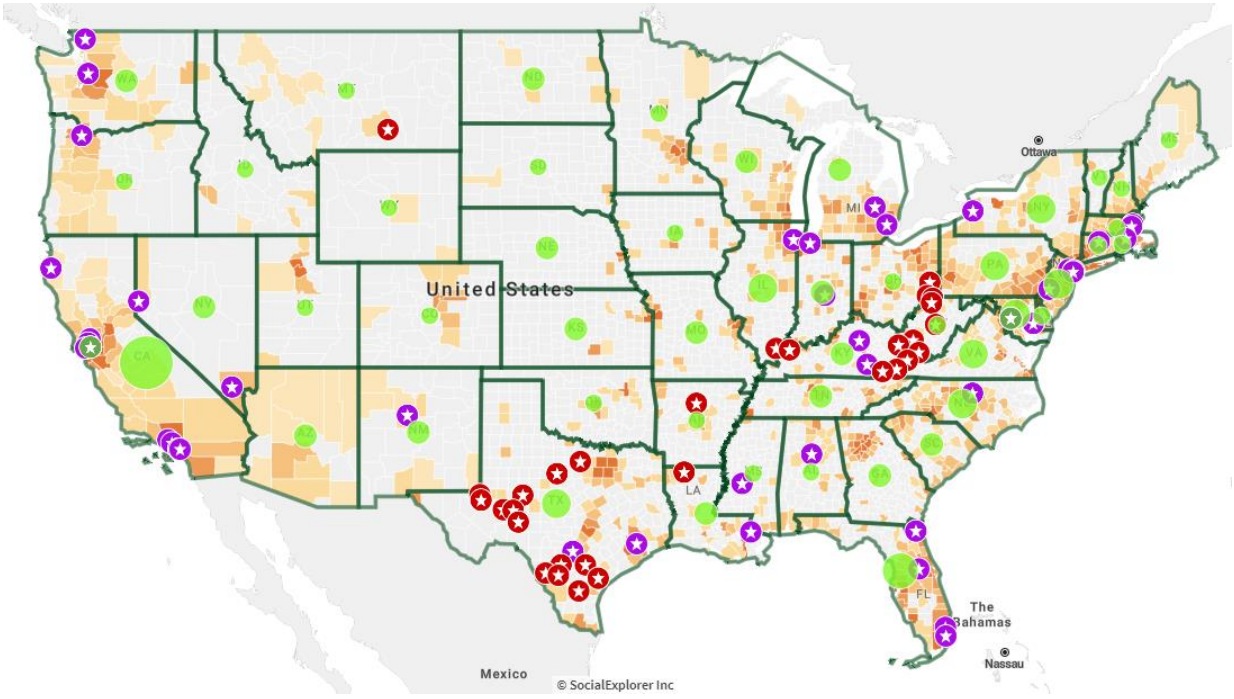
Crowe & Li (2020:3) utilized the concept of "spatial mismatch" to describe the mismatch in the energy transition between locations where jobs in the fossil fuel industry are being lost and locations where new jobs in renewable and clean energy sectors are being created. Specifically they offered the example of a mismatch between where jobs in the coal industry were diminishing and where jobs in the solar industry were emerging (Crowe & Li 2020:6). While California had over 76000 solar jobs as of 2020, Wyoming and West Virginia, states that had suffered great losses in coal industry employment, had a combined total of 431. (Crowe & Li 2020). The authors described displaced fossil fuel workers as "ecological refugees (Crowe & Li 2020).

Importantly, many scholars and activists within the energy justice and environmental justice communities would be quick to point out that the contrast between the high-paying fossil fuel jobs that existed for decades in those communities for relatively few (often white, often male) workers, on the one hand; and the low-paying jobs occupied by people (relatively many, and often people of color) in urban areas that sometimes host polluting fossil fuel based industries, on the other hand, might also be described as a "spatial mismatch" – one that exists across social space as well as geographic space. Such spatial mismatches pervade other aspects of the energy transition, including equitable access to affordable energy in both urban and rural communities and access to and involvement in decision making pertaining to energy (Carley & Konisky 2020).

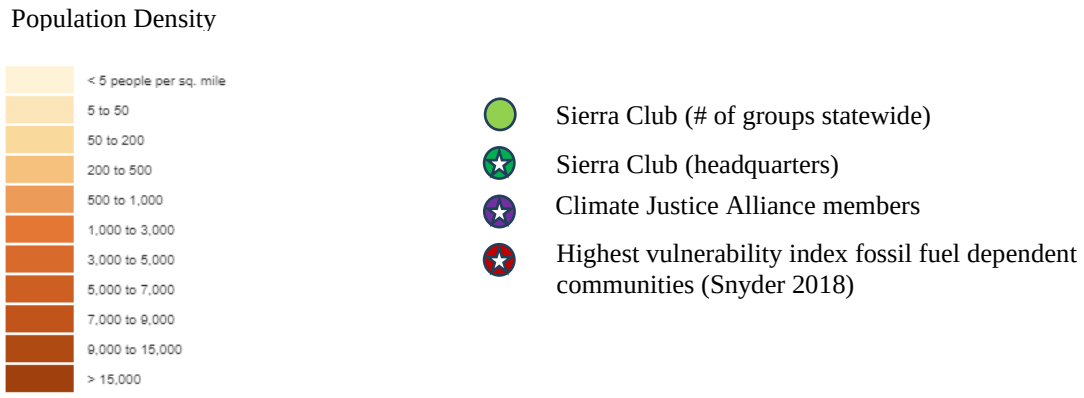
A final "mismatch" – spanning both social and geographic space – is the primary focus of this chapter. This is the mismatch between the location of many fossil fuel dependent communities, often small rural communities, most in less densely populated areas and/or in historically "red" states and the concentrations of some of the powerhouses in energy transition discursive and advocacy work – often located in large urban areas, many in "blue" states (Figure 1). Figure 1 illustrates this comparison. Red star icons indicate the locations of the fossil fuel dependent communities that are most vulnerable in the energy transition, as identified by Snyder (2018). Purple star icons identify the locations of member organizations in the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) (Climate Justice Alliance 2024), whose Just Transition framework is widely circulated among energy transition organizations Two green star icons identify the locations of the headquarters of the Sierra Club, in Oakland, CA, and its legislative headquarters in Washington, D.C.. Green bubbles indicate, according to their size, the number of Sierra Club chapters in each state, with each bubble mapped on the state's geographic center. As

demonstrated in the Figure, most vulnerable fossil fuel dependent communities are located in rural areas, while CJA member organizations are most often located in large urban centers, as are the Sierra Club headquarters. Moreover, there is little geographic overlap between the locations of the most vulnerable fossil fuel dependent communities and ETOs. While the former are concentrated primarily in rural Kentucky, West Virginia, and Texas, most CJA and Sierra Club locations are concentrated in densely populated areas, with the highest concentrations found primarily in coastal and midwestern states.

Figure 1: "Spatial Mismatch" in Locations of Energy Transition Organizations and Most Vulnerable Fossil Fuel Dependent Communities



"Population Density (Per Sq. Mile)." 2022. Social Explorer. (Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau; accessed October 24 2024).



Spatial Dialectics in the Energy Transition

These spatial mismatches and the tensions that can arise from them can be analyzed through a lens of spatial dialectics. Dialectical thinking was developed by Hegel and was provided a material basis by Marx in the context of political economy (Halvorsen 2017: 446). Dialectics "helps make sense of how particularly contradictory social relations develop and unfold historically, rather than naturally pre-exist" (Halvorsen 2017: 454). Spatial dialectics grew from the work of Soja (1980) who, building on Lefebvre, added the third term of spatiality to the historicality-sociality dialectic, acknowledging that social relations do not take place "on the head of a pin" and unfold not only historically but also geographically (Halvorsen 2017: 454). Expanding the temporal conception of thesis-antithesis to include the spatial element made possible analysis of "co-dependent yet antagonistic moments of space" (Halvorsen 2017: 446).

Spatial dialectics, which emphasizes the processual and historicized nature of the structural concepts of space, has only recently been applied to social movements. Halvorsen (2017) provides a notable example of the development of spatial dialectics in the context of the Occupy London movement. They show that the spatial strategy pursued by Occupy London created tensions that undermined the movement's goals. Spatial dialectics is particularly well

suited to analyze socio-spatial movements like the energy transition that contain contradictions that exist across both geographical and social space.

I add to this discussion of spatial dialectics in social movements an inquiry into a case in which the entities that comprise components of the dialectic are not all neatly contained within the movement, but rather in which some occupy adjacent stakeholder positions. Given the aforementioned interrelatedness between geographical and social space, in this analysis I interpret the "spatial" component of spatial dialectics broadly to include social space. To engage in this work I draw from analyses of the perspectives and experiences of leaders and members of energy transition organizations as well as other stakeholders in the energy transition.

Methods

To explore how ETOs prioritize bridging social and geographical distance in their connecting work I draw from interviews with staff members and leaders from ETOs across the United States. I also draw from participant-observation conducted with an energy transition movement in Oregon. These methods provide complementary insights.

For the interviews, I spoke with staff members of energy transition organizations across the United States. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 staff members or leaders of 20 energy transition organizations in 13 states. Organizations were located in regions with varying histories and experiences with fossil fuel extraction, processing and combustion, and the accompanying economic, ecological and social consequences. ETO areas of focus also varied within the energy transition movement (i.e.: carbon reduction, community development, environmental justice, etc.), as did the degree to which ETOs were focused on bridge-building

(ranging from bridging being a substantial part of the organization's work to it not being an overly recognized component of its work).

Participants too had various roles in their organizations including community organizers, policy advocates, and communications managers. I thus gathered information from individual organizers embedded in their organizational context. Like any member of an organization, the organizers I spoke with were situated at various structural points within their organizations and related to me their knowledge of their organization from their unique vantage point and positionality. It may be expected that a communications manager might have a different perspective on their organization than an executive director, or a grassroots organizer.

The variation in these elements (organizational area of focus within the ET movement, degree of organizational focus on both bridging, and the role variability of the staff members with whom I spoke) all constrain the extent to which these data can be used to directly compare between organizations within this study, as these factors are not held constant for comparison. These interviews are not intended to be representative. Rather, I consider them cases that can be examined for elucidation of potential patterns and processes. The data collected represents a variety of geographic, political, environmental, and organizational contexts. I use the dataset as a whole to observe a wide swathe of organizational practices from different vantage points across the ET movement. I zoom in on some of these practices and perspectives to try to identify patterns and trends across the movement – perhaps identifying some worthy of future research specifically designed to control rigorously for each of the aforementioned factors.

Recruitment consisted of emails to individual staff members' email addresses, as listed on organizations' websites, or generic organization email addresses were used if necessary. The overall response rate was about 50%. About seventy percent of participants presented as women,

a figure relatively consistent with the gender distribution in the environmental organizing field. Only about twenty percent of participants were identified by me as people of color. This figure roughly aligns with the racial/ethnic ratios of many energy transition organizations located in rural fossil fuel extraction regions. It is, however, far below the ratio for some others, particularly organizations focusing on extraction in tribal regions, as well as many organizations located in communities located further down the commodity chain (near power plants, for example). While opposition to energy transition, a major subject of this study, is concentrated in largely white fossil fuel extraction regions, it is certainly not exclusively found there, and the relative lack of voices of people of color is a limitation of this study.

The majority of participants in this study spoke with me on Zoom, although phone and in-person interviews were conducted when preferred by the participant. Interview duration ranged from just under thirty minutes to over two hours. I audio recorded all interviews and transcribed them using Sonix software, and I used Atlas.ti for data analysis.

I identified emergent themes using a modified abductive reasoning approach (Timmermans & Tavory 2012). This method can be compared with grounded theory methodology (Charmaz & Belgrave 2012) in that instead of taking an entirely inductive theoretical approach, it advocates for a hybrid inductive-deductive approach. Its founders acknowledge that much sociological qualitative analysis is in fact not conducted entirely inductively and that an abductive approach better captures the process that many scholars engage in in practice.

In my case, I approached my analysis process with some idea of the themes that I had heard during data collection. Additionally, I had some idea of the theoretical concepts that could be useful. Nonetheless, I wanted to allow other insights to emerge as well. I engaged in an

iterative process of open coding and focused coding (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 2011), interspersed with reference to what was appearing to be relevant literature.

I supplemented interview-derived data with insights from participant-observation with an energy transition campaign in Oregon – the Oregon Clean Energy Opportunity campaign - over the course of two years. As a results of constraints due to COVID at the time, the campaign took place almost entirely virtually using Zoom meetings. I participated in three parts of that campaign. The first part consisted of a five-session Energy Justice Leadership Institute (EJLI) Part I that took place between December 2020 and January 2021, which was primarily focused on teaching grassroots participants about the energy system. The second part of EJLI was called the Grassroots Action Teams, which took place weekly between January and July 2021. The Grassroots Action Teams component was focused on continuing to educate grassroots participants, but this time the content was more heavily focused on training for grassroots participation in the legislative process, both generally and specifically concerning three OCEO-promoted bills. After EJLI Part II I continued participation in the campaign's HB 2021 Community Advocates group, which was a smaller group that advised on implementation of the bills, from the perspectives of community members. This took place biweekly between October 2022 and October 2023. I also attended two Oregon Citizens' Utility Board (CUB) conferences to which I was invited as an OCEO participant in October 2022 and October 2023. At these conferences I was able to meet with fellow EJLI participants and leaders face-to-face, build camaraderie, and discuss energy-related issues in person.

I participated actively in sessions including contributing to conversations both in small and large group settings and asking questions. I did, however, wait until other participants had offered their input first, to reduce my influence on others' comments as much as I could. I also

participated in practice exercises and actual participation in OCEO campaign events including providing testimony on a piece of legislation for a Public Utility Commission meeting and lobbying a representative to support one of the campaign's proposed bills. Data from participant observation activities are from either written field notes, review of meeting presentations and recordings, and general observations and insights gained from the experience of participating in the campaign. Throughout my participation in EJLI and Community Advocates I was able to learn not only the topics that were discussed in these meetings, but the ways the meetings were structured, how organizers prioritized different topics and demands. I was then able to combine these experiential and observational data with data from interviews with OCEO leaders to consider, from multiple angles, why organizations might prioritize various kinds of bridging work.

Findings

A Spatial Mismatch

In this section I provide evidence and details concerning the spatial mismatch between the location of fossil fuel communities and the location of most energy transition organizations and organizing activity. Also observable through these data are examples of how study participants perceived and navigated these mismatches. Often, fossil fuel communities are located in "red" states and/or rural areas and ET organizations and their organizing efforts are centered in "blue" states and/or large urban areas.

The rural-urban tension was evident to some organizers that were part of the Oregon Clean Energy Opportunity campaign. Ilana explained, "I think sometimes it's really forgotten in

that urban rural divide where next thing you know everything centered on a big city and [you] just keep hearing people sharing their perspectives, but they're all from the bigger city. And so you don't feel connected to it, right? You don't feel like you can envision yourself there. You don't see yourself as part of those conversations." Another organizer in that campaign, Melissa, echoed her sentiments, "I mean, to be totally honest, there's work to be done. And like recently, I've been reflecting on how we really need to have an equitable approach for engaging rural communities – like Portland based orgs will come forward with their policies because they have more resources…And if we decide to have one interview with [a rural community] on our entire EJ policy committee, that's not equitable." Ilana noted that this resulted in the content of the bills "coming from mostly Portland based kind of organizations and thinking. And so I think that rural perspective was really missing out as well." Here organizers describe a salient rural-urban mismatch within the state of Oregon.

A similar process was observed in comments made by an organizer from Illinois. Rachel described a geographic bias in the clean energy jobs campaign that her organization was a part of, which she said was "about listening to communities, leading with nation-leading environmental equity focused energy legislation, and then sharing in the benefits of a new clean energy economy." The campaign held over 100 listening sessions but, she noted, "Obviously there's a huge Chicago focus to this work just 'cause – in our D.C. – Sierra Club, ya know, all the "Big Greens" are in Chicago." She described how when the coalition did hold some of the listening sessions in rural areas more likely to have some economic interest in fossil fuels, the number of people who attended could be counted on one hand.

This pattern of where meetings and organizing efforts happen can impact who shows up to those meetings, and the decisions that are made. This process is illustrated by Rachel's

organization's involvement with the clean energy jobs campaign . She descibed the coalition's decision making process for locating job resources:

> We have thirteen workforce hubs across the state that prioritize placement for people from equity eligible communities, which are environmental justice communities, as well as other communities that have been have faced disinvestment…environmental justice areas, people from foster care, people that have been incarcerated have preferred placement in these workforce hubs. Energy workers also have preferred placement - displaced energy workers also have preferred placement. The hubs were really placed based on serving the equity eligible communities, not necessarily serving the displaced energy workers as far as where they are located across the state, which is something that…ultimately we had more equity voices - EJ voices in the coalition than we did, you know...coal communities.

In this example, the prevalence of environmental justice advocates in those conversations resulted in prioritizing environmental justice communities over displaced energy workers or their communities.

This could lead to tension surrounding the relative valuation of the needs of fossil fuel workers and other workers. Rachel said of her experience working with the coalition:

> …there was some times when it felt like there was conflict between like, do we really need to give a laid off mine workers, laid off power plant workers, free tuition to Illinois colleges? Like there's a lot of black and brown underserved communities that have been left out for years, like, yeah, do folks in other…So there were maybe, sometimes conflicts and ultimately the provision to provide college for transitioning workers did not make it into the bill. There is a displaced energy worker dependent scholarship, which is interesting. I think there were some compromises made. I don't know why we felt if a worker can show need their dependents can get a year tuition scholarship.

Here providing support for displaced workers and their families is seen to be in conflict with doing the same for historically marginalized BIPOC communities. In a context of historic disinvestment in educational and other resources for BIPOC communities, the organizer appears skeptical of providing educational supports for what she perceives to be newly marginalized displaced fossil fuel workers. This example demonstrates how the spatial mismatch between fossil fuel communities and energy transition organizing can result in tensions concerning whose

concerns and issues merit the greatest consideration. This can impact ET organizations' prioritization of their bridging work.

Typology

Organizations connecting with members, the public, or other organizations conduct their work on a multi-dimensional spectrum of factors; here we focus on social and geographic distance between the organization and the individuals/entities with which it works to establish connection. I operationalize a limited version of "social distance" – focusing on an element of it that is rarely studied in the energy transition literature – the political and ideological component. Other components of social distance also warrant attention in the context of the energy transition, such as ETOs bridging across social distance to tribal communities, or across class boundaries. This is particularly true of some segments of the ET movement (the "wonkier" and more technical and policy-oriented segments often dominated by white and middle- to upper-class individuals and often focusing on issues of energy supply as opposed to energy justice.) However, in this analysis I focus on political/ideological aspects of social distance. I define "geographically distant," for the purposes of this analysis, roughly and loosely as outside of one's immediate community. The location at which an organization's work falls on this spectrum can change with each particular action or with each individual with whom it attempts to connect. I use the four quadrants below (Table 1) as a heuristic to conceptualize and discuss these actions. However, social distance is itself multifaceted, and geographic distance is relative, so the quadrants blur into each other, as will be addressed following a discussion of some examples to illustrate each quadrant.

Table 1: Bridge-Building Typology

	Socially local	Socially distant
Geographically local	Outreach at a local clean energy festival	Outreach at a local job fair for miners and heavy equipment operators
Geographically distant	Alliance with energy transition organizations in other states	Focus group with leaders of United Mine Workers union across the state or in other states

Geographically and socially local

An emblematic example of geographicallly and socially local bridging work is recruitment that an organization may engage in to recruit new members. Unless necessary, organizations will seek friendly turf and audiences expected to share common interests. An organizer in North Carolina, Bill, explains, "if it's something more general, kind of just like buliding membership and people that take part in actions and stuff like that" their organization has gone to events that "tend to have kind of like more…environmentally conscious [attendees], you know, whether it's energy events or Earth Day things or local community festivals." When membership expansion in terms of simple numbers is an organization's goal, geographically and socialy local bridging work may be the easiest and most efficient approach.

Geographically distant, socially local

In these data, geographically distant bridging work was identified primarily between actors that were socially local to each other. For example an ET organizer in California, Harland, was a member of a clean energy coaliton in Utah due to a prior inter-state collaboration on a campaign to prevent a coal export terminal in California. The coalition meetings happened remotely and were thus accessible to the participant. He explained, "The seed money [for the

terminal] was supposed to come from Utah…mineral lease revenues that should have gone…to mitigate the effects of coal mining in Utah and benefit the residents of rural Utah, where this coal mining is taking place." This expansive collaboration demonstrated a clear recognition of the geographically wide-ranging interconnections that the fossil fuel system generates. Yet the connection was also socially local because it was between energy transition organizers sharing a common interest in clean energy generally, and in the prevention of that coal export terminal specifically.

Other geographically distant and socially local partnerships that emerged in these data occurred between similar organizations in other states. For example, Lucille, from an organization in southeastern Ohio, part of northern Appalachia, described her organization's "deep organizational partnerships with other nonprofits in Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina, you know, the other Appalachian states." These kinds of coalitions were common and often cited between organizations with similar structures or focuses.

Geographically local, socially distant

In these data, socially distant bridging work was often done geographically locally. There were cases where this bridging work occurred across various kinds of social distance, including class, in the case of an organization in New York City, as explained by Tonya, a staff member there. I focus here on the political or ideological dimension of social distance. Bill, from North Carolina, describes door-to-door bridging work his organization engaged in, in his community but across political and ideological divides: "I've ran into I mean, all kinds of stories of folks who definitely had no interest in talking to us, much less us being at their door, on their property,

they've chased us off." Their organization must draw from a variety of strategies to make such bridging work more effective.

Another common situation in which organizations might engage in geographically local and socially distant bridging work was during a campaign for or against a particular community issue – such as the closing of a power plant or refinery, or the halting of a proposed fossil fuel infrastructure project. For example, during a campaign against a coal export terminal, Harland, the organizer from California, described, "I've never seen a community come together to oppose something, to unite the way [the people of my city did]". He cited the racial and ethnic divisions that risked dividing the community, and how the developers tried to offer money to predominantly Black churches to gain support. He also described how a dock workers union joined the campaign against the terminal, despite the developers' efforts.

It appears that there is greater consideration of fossil fuel workers that could suffer economically from facility closures when the facilities and workers are local to the area. For example, Kham, an organizer in California, described his organization's thoughts concerning local fossil fuel workers in the organization's ongoing fight with Chevron concerning an oil refinery. He said: "In our work…we always think that the workers [are our community members]. We want to protect them because they are the front line, really, they are working there...when [the] Chevron [explosion] happened they…almost got killed there. We worry about them!...If [a] disaster happened the community will suffer too – but the worker will be the first…So it's not like we separate. It's just the industry, Chevron use[s] that to divide." His organization considers workers part of their community and part of their fight against Chevron. The organization recently received state grant money "to put…labor…and the community working together as a partnership looking to the just transition piece and then also [to] look at

[whether] there might be a place that we might be able to work together and make sure that we take the worker and also take the community [into consideration]." They were to begin meetings at which a paid facilitator would help identify places where they could work toward common objectives. My data revealed, in contrast, few examples of this kind of powerful bridging work and relationship-building occurring over geographic distance.

Geographically and socially distant

I refer to the cases where geographically and socially distant bridging work were observed in my data as "two-dimensional," in reference to the dimensions of social and geographic distance. These data provided examples of working across social and geographic distance in advocacy and in direct green tech adoption.

In the case of technology adoption there were examples of two-dimensional bridging work across a state. According to Lucille, the organizer from Ohio, her organization engaged in bridging work in rural areas outside their county and across the state with a grant regarding rural electric vehicle (EV) adoption and the installation of charging stations. Lucille described the multiple economic and social challenges associated with working in rural places. In addition to generally reduced resource availability in rural areas for programs such as EV adoption, the organization was engaged in "just challenging some perceptions around clean energy" due to skepticism surrounding a history of the region "being used as an internal colony…exploited for our resources." Of the skepticism, she clarified, "I think it's politicized." She explained that the community leads in renewable energy adoption in the region; at the same time, she said there are "just as many voices that come from the coal proud generational communities that see this, whether appropriately or not, see this as a threat to some core values around 'We're a proud coal

family and we always will be.'" Her organization worked with these communities, thereby working across social and geographic distance at the same time.

Another example of working across two-dimensional distance came from Rachel's organization in Illinois that was working as part of the statewide coalition to pass the clean energy jobs policy. Her organization was part of the "downstate" (everywhere in Illinois that is not Chicago) arm of the coalition, and held community conversations in communities "that were maybe more…rural, um, you know, [where] we didn't have coalition members from". In these communities her organization was focused on "Can we get feedback from communities through these listen-lead-share events, and community conversations, can we build support for policies, in these communities…as you I'm sure know that's very difficult to do, you know, I had events where four people came…." She continued to explain how she would address the subject of energy transition at those meetings and other similar events with audiences who held different views on subjects such as climate change. Both Lucille and Rachel expressed their distance from the perspectives of the people with whom they were organizing over wide geographic distances while also, to varying degrees, expressing understanding of their perspective and situation. They therefore worked across both social and geographic distance.

An organization in Montana, from which I interviewed two staff members, provides a final example of two-dimensional bridging work. It is headquartered in one of Montana's largest cities but has chapters across the state, particularly focused in fossil fuel dependent regions. The staff members described a renewable energy campaign that was held across Montana. Vera from the organization noted, "A big part of the work is education and narrative work. I'm sure it's no surprise to you that Montana has the jobs-versus-the-environment narrative when it comes to energy transition, and so we are certainly making sure that our messaging and the stories that we

are putting forth are working…to counter that or to put forward another narrative, one [in] which you…do not have to choose." Aside from the renewable energy campaign, the organization also organizes around fossil fuel infrastructure, in terms of holding fossil fuel companies accountable during operations or facility retirements. In these fossil fuel dependent communities, members are not usually fossil fuel industry workers; rather, there are a high proportion of members who are farmers and ranchers, who may have an inordinate interest in the ongoing health of the land. In this case, distance between members and the organization in terms of perspectives on the particular issue may not be as great, while distance on other ideological/political issues may persist. This organization seeks out geographically distant impacted communities and engages in real grassroots bridge-building in those communities. Thus they are able to take advantage of the benefits of geographically local bridge-building across social distance within each community.

Prioritizing Socially and Geographically Distant Bridge-Building

Why do organizations or organizers prioritize a particular locus of action over another in their bridging work? I describe here what my data revealed about some of the reasons and mechanisms underlying that prioritization.

Geographic and Social Location: Real and Perceived Boundaries

The geography of ETO bridging work is influenced, firstly, by where the issues are located. For example, Rachel from the organization in Illinois described, "I have coworkers that work on water impacts from agriculture. Obviously, that's, you know, not Chicago," referencing that her organization, which focuses on energy issues among other issues, works in rural areas where agriculture is more common. Similarly, the organization in Montana conducts work in

mining and other fossil fuel dependent communities across Montana, which are generally both socially and geographically distant locations, because that is where the mines are that they are trying to monitor or retire.

Jurisdictional issues can also constrain the geographical and social breadth of bridging work that organizations pursue, as it can limit the groups and locations that are perceived to be stakeholders. For example, in a campaign formed to advocate for a state policy, state residents may appear to be the only stakeholders. Similarly, when Kham from California described his organization's fight against Chevron's treatment of their community, it was a geographically local and community-based effort.

An organization's own social and geographic location can impact its propensity to engage in socially and geographically distant bridging work. First, organizers may face constraints or opportunities concerning their access to socially distant people. For example, Harland, from the San Francisco Bay area of California could not recall meeting anyone who did not believe in anthropogenic climate change, and he did not know of any Republican legislators in his area. Thus he could experience an insulating, echo-chamber effect, and may not have many people around him that are socially distant. In contrast, organizers working in areas with greater political diversity or more history with fossil fuel dependent economies may have more ready access to more socially distant people. When they engage in typical recruitment activities, then, such as "tabling" at a local farmer's market or going door-to-door, organizations in more socially, ideologically or politically diverse communities are more likely to make connections with more socially distant recruits.

This set of factors is not so much the result of active choices on the part of the organization, but rather a consequence of the historical spatial development of the energy

transition movement and energy infrastructure. Organizations and organizers do make active decisions concerning their bridging work, however, and these will be explored in the next sections.

Locally based bridging work

To some organizations, working geographically locally is mission-critical. When describing how her Kentucky-based organization fits into just transition as a movement, Alicia described the centrality of working locally:

> There's sort of this - there's like two different threads. So the thread that [my organization] is a part of is really this side of just transition where we believe in investing in small, and very hyper local. And how do we…branch out from just providing jobs? So how are we transforming communities into places that have a lot of amenities and that are places where people really want to stay and invest in? But then there is also another thread of transition that isn't really rooted in justice or equity and is more rooted in just the capitalist economy that we're all sort of swimming through. And this side of the coin is really more about industrial recruitment and you know…how do we do these big, huge things that are going to hire hundreds of people at once…But it's just a really simple – it's a simple narrative and it's a simple framework that people are operating from, and they're not really taking a breath and taking time to say, 'Is this really what we want? Are these the jobs that people want to have or are these jobs that are gonna - is this a company that's going to pay its fair share of taxes and reinvest into this community and help us fund our schools and our road work and our water lines?'"

Her organization's answer to the threat of capital's takeover of the energy transition is working small and locally to make sure work done in their community is in the best interest of the community.

Often organizations prioritized geographically local organizing when they were trying to work across social distance. Alicia also revealed that her organization is able to work with socially distant people because of a common concern about the local community. She explained, "A lot of times we're in conversations and in spaces with political leaders or community leaders that are are the complete opposite on the political spectrum from what – who we are as an

organization and what we're trying to accomplish. But we're still able to have civil conversations and advance work in some way because those folks care just as much about their communities as we do, and they care just as much about providing for people as we do." In this way, working geographically locally enables her organization to work across social distance. Similarly, Kham works to build (geographically) local coalitions across identity groups because Chevron consistently tries to divide the community along those lines.

Organizers may work geographically locally when trying to bridge social distance due to a knowledge of good bridging practices. As discussed in Chapter II, bridge-building is most effective when those initiating the bridge-building are not seen as outsiders, when there is sufficient time to build trust, hear people's stories, and appreciate nuances. Matt, an organizer from a right-leaning environmental organization in Texas, explained what he thought would most effectively help in organizing: "And it's really, you know, when outside groups come in and try to build something in a community, there's a hesitancy there because you sort of think 'These people aren't from here, they don't know this town.' And so one of the areas that we're trying to expand into is more of that local sort of bottom-outward model to where we have more local people who are rooted in their communities and able to make, make and hold those connections more." Local people, being more "rooted" and having more connections in a community are likely to have a better and more nuanced understanding of that community. Similarly, Molly from Montana prioritized "being on the ground and having it be neighbor led to have more trust." She contrasted the experience of a previous organizer, who was unable to spend a lot of time on-site in the community due to living in a different city, with her own experience: "I've been putting a lot of time into meeting with people there and building trust and communication.

And like all of a sudden, there's a lot more people who are involved. So I think being on the ground has been…huge."

Some participants also suggested that rooting their work in not just their local human community but the physical place itself, is central to their work. Tim from an organization in West Virginia described this link: "It is *the* most important factor of everything that we do…And so like there's deep cultural, religious, familial connections to the land that you can't just…pretend doesn't exist." He highlights how the connections to the land that exist in his community impact how his organization prioritizes their work. Similarly, Vera noted, "Montanans have an incredible pride of place and that transcends political persuasion." Sometimes ET organizers are able to build connections that start from a shared sense of place; in such cases they might prioritize geographically local bridging work.

Minimizing Input:Output

Due to the resource constraints organizations commonly face, they often seek to maximize their output for the amount of effort, staff time and resources they have to expand. Here I explore the more specific mechanisms through which they might manage resource constraints in a way that influences how they approach social and geographic distance in bridging work.

Organizations will often draw upon existing relationships and connections. For example, a labor-environment coalition leader, Arjun, noted that most of his organization's partners were located in the vicinity of the city in which his organization was located. He said, "So there is kind of a geographic, unfortunate, not intended bias. But, you know, I think all relationships revolve closest to where you are…." When selecting sites for projects organizations may choose

sites close to their office or headquarters. Lucille noted, “we’re a statewide nonprofit but we’re located in [a particular region of] Illinois, so [a particular staff member] works locally here on educating on that program, so [the town] where our office is probably has the most [program name] projects in the entire state.” The relationships that organizers draw from are historically and socially located. The locally based work can establish relationships that inform future geographically local bridging work.

Past collaborations or coalition work can influence future work. Mobilization for the Jordon Cove Pipeline campaign in southern Oregon established relationships that informed organizing for the OCEO campaign. Additionally, connections from one part of an organizer’s work can be leveraged for another part of their work. For example, alliances from local work might be leveraged for more state-based work. In Oregon, organizations that were members of the OCEO campaign used their existing organizational networks to recruit for the Listening Tour and the Energy Justice Leadership Institute. Ilana explained, “So since there [were] many groups across the state doing these listening sessions [my organization] really prioritized, like what groups are we, what communities and groups do we already talk to that we already have going on? So like [a particular program’s name] was a program we already had going on…so it was just kind of like naturally we were like, well, these are the communities that we're working with that we have built relationships with, and so we just made sure to outreach to them…Like we told everyone, bring a friend.” This kind of “snowball” recruitment through existing connections is likely to generate socially local connections.

In some cases organizations appeared to work socially or geographically locally as a way to avoid unecessary conflict. For example, Melissa described how the OCEO campaign intentionally limited their community outreach and communcations or going public with their

campaign. Instead, they used their existing contacts to gain support in order to avoid “stirring up” opposition.

Ilana offered the most candid description of the process of limiting outreach and bridging work for the purpose of avoiding contention. When I asked her about the challenges of recruiting rural individuals in the OCEO campaign, she had this to say: “It could be sometimes complicated of like, ‘Oh, well, people believe a certain thing then maybe they shouldn't be invited to these spaces’ or things like that.” She explained that she observed that people involved in the campaign and in the movement sometimes appeared to hold the opinion: “‘This is how we feel and this is how we think it should go’ rather than inviting more conversation". She noted the feeling of fear that she felt might underlie that attitude. "I think people are sometimes scared to have those conversations of like the downfalls of clean energy or like ‘How do we mitigate these things?’" She thinks it can be uncomfortable for people because sometimes there are no clear-cut answers. As Harland from California put it: “People want easy answers to difficult questions” because it makes people feel good about themselves and provides reassurance that they are right. In this scenario, it is perhaps not only psychologically easier for a particular organizer, but the less resource-heavy path for the organization, to tend toward limiting the breadth of targets for bridging work.

Discussion

Social-Geographical Distance Trade-Off

One potential reason for the low frequency of geographically distant bridging in these data, as well as in prior literature, is that social movements (or social movement organizations)

must decide how to invest limited resources – intensively or extensively across geographic space (Halvorsen 2017: 454). Additionally, organizations must act at the scale at which they have power and at which they have the potential of making an impact. Geographically local organizing is more feasible for organizations, particularly those with fewer financial or human resources (Nicholls 2009). Additionally, because comprehensive federal energy transition policy is lacking, states develop their own policy, and they differ. (Roemer & Haggerty 2021). This may make it more difficult for organizations to work together across states or on issues that span multiple states.

The geographically distant connections that my data did reveal were mostly formed between organizations with a common interest in energy transition, either in campaigns for a particular initiative, or more enduring alliances. This is common; examples of this kind of coalition exist across the literature. For example, Cha and Pastor (2022:6) describe just transition coalitions that span geographic regions such as Appalachia or the Gulf Coast. Connections between geographically distant social movement organizations may be more likely to occur between socially proximate actors because of the resources that can be involved in making and maintaining such connections – organizations are only likely to put forth such resources when they are fairly certain the connection will benefit the movement they are part of or be beneficial to the organization in some way (Nicholls 2009).

On the other hand, most of the socially distant connections identified in these data (at least when one focuses in on the political/ideological dimension of social distance, as I do here - for example, labor-environmental coalitions) were relatively local geographically, within a community, or within a particular metropolitan area.

In the absence of homophily, or with limited homophily, geographic nearness can facilitate actors making a connection, or even encountering each other in the first place. With the expansion of the internet and social media, meeting people no longer *requires* physical co-location (Nicholls 2009). However, given the power of social media algorithms and echo chambers, it becomes more difficult for actors to randomly encounter others virtually who are vastly socially different (Cinelli et al 2021; Interian et al 2023).

My data suggested that organizations will prioritize different strategies in their bridging work to reduce the ratio of effort to reward. If people tend to choose the course that requires the least effort expended (Zipf 1949), people who are more nearby would be more likely contacts. The Law of Distance-Interaction predicts that the "likelihood of interaction or contact of any kind between two social elements is a multiplicatively decreasing function of the distance between them, or of the costs of overcoming that distance" (Mayhew and Levinger 1977: 93). If organizations are already trying to bridge social distance, they may try to make such work as easy as possible by working close to home. Previously existing connections that organizations often leverage, according to my findings, may be more likely to be local, due to organizations' histories in a particular place – and the accompanying history of local relationships that have been built over time.

However, aside from ease and convenience, these data revealed that organizations sometimes intentionally choose geographically local sites for socially distant bridging – believing it allows for greater development of trust, due in part to greater face-to-face interaction. Strong ties are more readily formed in a particular place due to: 1) more opportunities for cross-cutting/overlapping experienced issues; 2) proximity reducing the cost and risk of making connections; 3) the fact that interactions increase trust (Nicholls 2009). This may be especially

important for ET organizations trying to engage in bridging work while operating in an environment made intentionally contentious by political economic entities. Organizers also noted the importance of place in defining issues, rallying support, and serving as a common interest – a dimension of social distance that otherwise socially distant people can share. Places can serve as an anchor point for common experiences, "place frames" and place-based symbolic repertoires (Nicholls, Miller & Beaumont 2013). Bridging in a particular geographic location can allow organizers to draw upon locally common experiences, a shared sense of place, concern for a shared community, and feelings of frustration or sorrow from poor health or economic impacts due to decisions of a particular power plant in a community.

Thus it appears that social and geographic distance act as counterweights that must be balanced. My data provide further evidence that working at distance along the social axis in the ET movement appears to be associated with organizations working locally in the geographic dimension (and vice versa).

The Socially and Geographically Distant Void

In terms of recruitment or mobilization, it appears that people distant on both social and geographic dimensions do not appear on many organizations' radars. In a case in which a local coalition targets a particular power plant or refinery, either for regulation or shutdown, the issue is often seen as place-based, confined to the particular community. Certainly, the most visible and direct impacts may occur within the local community. However, given the interconnectedness of the energy transition system, it may be short-sighted to fail to acknowledge the interconnected fates of geographically distant communities, workers and environments.

In other cases, these distant others may be on the radar but connecting with them may not pursued as an organizational priority. (Recall the instance of "glossing over" the concern about the environmental impacts of solar panel mining and manufacturing on geographically distant communities in the OCEO campaign.) An apparent paucity of concern for socially or geographically distant others may be explained by varying assessments of risk. People may be less risk-averse concerning socially distant others (Sun et al 2017). We can expect that similar processes may occur for geographically distant others.

Due to the spatial mismatch between the locations of ET impacts and ET organizing, some (though not all) of the people advocating for systemic energy transition have never actually seen many of the infrastructure, worksites, and communities that work within or bear the burdens of the energy system. They may have little concrete knowledge of the actual problems facing this wide range of communities.

Construal level theory posits that as psychological distance increases, people must rely more on abstract construal than perception (Stephen et al 2011: 2). According to the theory, psychological distance has four components: spatial, temporal, hypotheticality, and social (Stephen et al 2011:2). Anything that cannot be perceived must be construed – much like the brain and eye "fill in" missing pieces of a picture. The more distant something is from us on any of these four dimensions, the more abstractly we will construe it (Stephen et al 2011:2). Other people's behavior (Stephen et al 2011:3) and outgroups (Stephen et al 2011:3) are construed more abstractly than our own behavior or ingroups. Outgroups are also construed as more homogeneous than ingroups (Stephen et al 2011:3). Thus, ET movement organizers who lack concrete familiarity with the challenges experienced by distant communities may perceive them as less important, urgent or worthy of advocacy than those near to them.

Just as climate denial was found to be enacted socially – through social groups and interactions – in a Norwegian community (Norgaard 2011), this construal level process may be occurring at an organizational, rather than an individual level, in the energy transition movement. In organizational planning for particular campaigns or prioritizing resources, it may be that the more more distant problems are de-prioritized. Some initial evidence of this emerged from my data. For example, organizations located in the same community as fossil fuel workers often expressed more sympathy for their situation than did organizations located more geographically distant. (And the pattern is multidirectional; anecdotal evidence from this work, as well as prior research suggests that social and/or geographic distance yields greater abstraction and less nuanced understanding concerning perceptions of environmental organizations, particularly in fossil fuel communities. While that is not the subject of this paper, that process also contributes to maintaining division concerning ET.)

Further directed research would be needed to systematically test this hypothesis; however, the current data are suggestive. One implication of construal-level theory operating in the context of the energy transition movement is that social movement discussions can become overly abstract and simplified. The outcomes can be counterproductive; for example, ET advocates in one part of a state who advocate for shutdown of a power plant in another part without knowing the complexity of the situation – without having actually been to the site – may inadvertently neglect advocating for the power plant company to clean up toxic ash ponds prior to its closure.

Dialectical Conflict in the Energy Transition Movement

The spatial mismatch that characterizes the energy transition movement establishes the components of a spatial dialectic. On the one hand, organizations face a variety of political and economic pressures to operate as effectively as possible with few resources – including gaining members or mobilizing supporters, creating at least apparently broad coalitions and partnerships, and in the case of advocacy organizations, winning campaigns. For reasons mentioned above, including the spatiality of the energy system and the energy transition movement, and the consequences of construal over distance, such circumstances can favor geographically and/or socially local bridging work.

Given these same spatial realities, however, the preference for social and geographic locality has resulted in a relative lack of energy transition organizing in areas and communities that have historically hosted fossil fuel economies, and that stand to lose the most from the energy transition. The lack of geographically distant and socially distant connections means that the weak ties that the ET movement has (Nicholls 2009: 78) are with people or organizations with a great deal of homophily. Thus, these ties have more bonding than bridging characteristics. Scholars have noted "homophily not only unifies, it also divides a network" (Yuan & Gay 2006: 1067). More broadly, the forging of alliances with some entities can result in the weakening of ties with others (Zajak & Haunss 2021). If bonding ties are too heavily prioritized, or if bridging ties are only with homophilous or only "token" socially distant organizations such as an unusually supportive labor union, the expansion of the movement can be limited. Nicholls argues: "the more a group's collective power is derived from internal cohesion, the wider the chasm between this clique and the various others in the political field. In this sense, the factors necessary for collective political action (i.e. place-based solidarities) are the same that unleash

the dynamics of particularism that fracture social movements." (Nicholls 2009: 80). Just as the spatial form of Occupy London was "shaping, and constraining, the social movement itself" (Halvorsen 2017: 449) – the focus on working socially or geographically locally can constrain the reach of the ET movement.

The over-emphasis of spatial and/or geographic locality can create tensions that run the risk of, as Halvorsen (2017: 454) observed of Occupy London, "undermin[ing] [the] original aims and goals" of the movement. They are mutually reinforcing and can also lead to failure of movement. Nicholls (2009: 80) discusses Harvey's (2001) comparison of "place in itself" and "place for itself" – a theoretical extension of the contrast between "class in itself" and "class for itself". He notes that in a "place in itself" scenario, "localised solidarities and relational attributes are viewed as a means of nourishing and feeding larger scale political struggles. Frames such as 'justice' and 'equality' help overcome disputes from multiple particularisms and make it easier to maintain the universal character of the movement" (Nicholls 2009: 80). A "place for itself" is "conceived as both the means and ends of a political mobilisation. Interests are tied to protect place from forces that threaten a group's status, privilege and way of life" (Nicholls 2009: 80). When a social movement that covers such vast social and geographical territory is over-reliant on localized connections and fails to reach socially and geographically distant others, its localized member organizations run the risk of operating under a "place for itself" mentality, alienating distant others and likely losing potential supporters.

My findings suggest that some organizations have recognized this tension. Organizations working in spaces that are both socially and geographically distant from themselves may be helping to shift the energy transition movement toward greater breadth and inclusivity, shifting the terms of this dialectic to reduce this tension.

Leading with Legacy

In the present dataset, the organizations that engaged in both socially and geographically distant bridging work tended to be located in regions with a history of fossil fuel dependent economy. They appear to occupy a unique position in the social movement landscape. Nicholls (2009:78) explains that different geographical features of networks (such as features that promote strong ties and those that promote weak ties) play important roles in social movements; similarly, we might expect that the elements of a social movement network that exist across disparate social space might also play different and important functions in the movement.

That this set of organizations occupies such a unique bridging role is likely influenced not just by their proximity to fossil fuel communities, but by their entire geographic and social location, and their resulting experiences accumulated over spatial history. For example, these organizations may have more experience working across political or ideological boundaries through their work on environmental issues in areas where that is not popular. We can contrast this with the organizer from the San Francisco Bay area who had not met anyone in his organizing work who was opposed to climate change policy.

Members of these organizations may also share certain aspects of place-based social location with people who are socially distant in other respects. For example, many members of the organization in Montana are farmers and ranchers. Due to that aspect of their social location, they may have an easier time relating to other members of that occupation who might initially be less supportive of the organization's work.

Moreover, leaders or members of these organizations may start out with, on average, a higher baseline level of familiarity with, and perhaps empathy for, the positions and perspectives

of extractive workers and community members than might be possessed by ET organizers located in other places because they have lived experience in that place. They have little need for abstract construal because they have concrete knowledge of the place and its challenges. Members of communities historically linked to a particular industry can sometimes develop a shared community cultural (Harrison 2012) or constructed economic (Bell & York 2010) identity related to the industry and based in place. Individuals involved in ET organizations located in fossil fuel regions may in fact share an emotional attachment to or respect for a fossil fuel industry with which their community has a history – even while advocating in a nuanced manner for its phase-out.

The geographical and social location of these organizations may allow them greater opportunity to do the hard bridging work of bridge-building over two-dimensional distance. They can fill an otherwise empty niche in the social movement network and avoid the pitfalls of militant particularism while still working locally, because they do both. Part of what allows organizations to bridge social and geographic distance at the same time appears to be related to the organizations' own social and geographical location. These findings also demonstrate that examination of social movement organizations along the two intersecting axes of social and geographic distance simultaneously reveals unique insights.

Conclusion

This chapter addressed a tension well-suited for spatial-dialectical analysis – the implications of the spatiality of the energy transition movement and energy infrastructure, on the one hand, and the tendencies of social movement organizations engaging in bridging work, on the other. I used insights from social network theory, social movement theory, and the social-

psychological construal-level theory to help understand the prioritization of various kinds of bridging work among energy transition organizations. This work demonstrated the importance of analyses in two-dimensional geographical-social space. In this case, such an analysis found support for the idea that energy transition organizations face a trade-off between socially distant and geographically distant bridging work. It also revealed a subset of organizations that, due in part to their own social-geographical position, appears to fill a niche in the social movement network that many other organizations cannot do so readily.

These findings must be interpreted in the context of several limitations of the analysis. The sample of organizations interviewed was relatively small and non-random, and findings were not controlled for by the type or main function of an organization. For example, certain types of organizations (such as those focused on community resilience in the face of energy transition) may be more likely to engage in socially and/or geographically distant bridging work than others (such as those focused on policy advocacy, for example). However, the patterns discussed are suggestive and provide goods grounds for further exploration.

For example, it would be useful to conduct a follow-up investigation of ETOs in fossil fuel dependent areas to explore the extent to which their two-dimensional bridging activity is due to the type of work they do (advocacy, community economic development, direct aid, etc.), or the presence/absence of active fossil fuel infrastructure, or other factors. Along similar lines, it would also be useful to control for organizational resource constraints to determine how much it, as opposed to an avoidance of conflict or difficulty, impacts prioritization of different kinds of bridging work.

Further, examining organizations in other socio-spatial movements outside the energy transition movement would help to assess the generalizability of the importance of the social-

geographical position of an organization in enabling it to engage in two-dimensional bridging. Lastly, given the importance of geographic proximity to the subject of two-dimensional bridging, directed investigations into how the proliferation of video conferencing software impacts bridging that spans geographic distance are needed.

For the energy transition movement itself this analysis may offer some helpful insights. It suggests, first, that organizations currently not engaging in two-dimensional bridging might be able to learn from those that are. It could be helpful to follow and be aware of their work, as this would make organizations more concretely aware of the situations of socially distant others – thereby mitigating construal-level processes. More concretely, other ETOs could directly connect with organizations engaged in two-dimensional bridging – in that case those organizations would become existing network connections as well as potential third-party brokers. Barring that, organizations could continue to forge connections with socially distant others in their own community. Reducing social distance with ideologically different others locally may lead to greater comfort with that process, thus facilitating socially distant connections at geographically distant locations in the future.

For their part, organizations in fossil fuel regions who have found success in two-dimensional bridge-building can connect with communities outside that region and serve as brokers. Doing so would similarly contribute to building both strong and weak ties and create more third-party brokers in strategic geographically and socially dispersed locations across the map.

Across the movement, organizations may benefit from greater exploration of how video conferencing technologies can be used to reduce perceived geographic distance. While during COVID these platforms were used extensively to connect with organizations' membership and

conduct business with existing coalitions, less has been done to explore its uses in two-dimensional bridging.

Actively engaging in higher-dimensional bridging work across the movement could contribute to building a more extensive and inclusive energy transition movement by shifting its identity. Capital-heavy energy corporations and political interests seek to impose on the movement a particular identity via divisive discourse during times when they want to stall energy transition policy change, limit its scope or push toward incremental rather than transformative change. In this context bridging in one dimension may at times appear impossible to many organizations. Reaching across multiple dimensions may, however, be a good investment in the continued expansion and future success of the movement.

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Chapter IV

The Power that Blinds Us and the Power Lines that Bind Us

Abstract

Social movement scholars have devoted great effort to identifying factors that make groups of individuals or organizations likely allies in a movement environment, and they have successfully developed conventional wisdom within the field. But what about instances in which some or all of these factors are absent? In some cases, it may still be worthwhile for these groups to try to work together. In such cases, the task for research then becomes to seek the answer to the question: How can this be done? The movement to transition away from fossil fuels and toward renewable energy presents such a case for examination. In this context, groups differently positioned within or adjacent to the movement, and groups located at different points along the fossil fuel commodity chain, may have different interpretations of their experiences vis-à-vis energy capital, as well as different cultural norms – both of which can make collective action more challenging. Yet they occupy similar structural positions relative to energy capital. Developing understanding of this similarity through frame alignment processes, particularly when accompanied by strategies to navigate cultural differences, can potentially form the foundation for the development of a solidaristic community-based class consciousness that links these groups. I draw from experiences conducting participant-observation in communities in Oregon and Montana, accompanied by in-depth interviews, to 1) identify differences in cultural norms and framing between the two sites; 2) identify similarities in structural position; and 3) explore opportunities for frame alignment and solidarity.

Contentious social movements often encounter cultural and ideological conflicts between stakeholders in the course of their movement activities. Capitalist power often attempts to take advantage of existing cultural differences in society and further divisions where possible to reduce social cohesion and collective power (Magdoff & Williams 2017:132); one realm of society in which this occurs is in social movements. As a result, communities facing similar challenges and indeed confronting similar capitalist power structures may not see themselves as sharing potential interests or *feel* similar to one another at all. Such feelings are not only symptomatic of a lack of social cohesion (Schiefer & van der Noll 2017), but they can also

present a challenge for social movements seeking to broaden their movements to include more ideologically or culturally diverse voices.

To some, seeking this kind of inclusivity in a social movement may feel counterintuitive or futile. Collective identity has been shown to aid in coalition formation (Enriquez 2014) and micromobilization (Snow et al 1986). It can be challenging and involve costly investments of financial and human resources, time and energy to work across ideological or cultural divides to seek to achieve a collective identity (Gawerc 2020). Yet benefits to a social movement can include a broader and more resilient base of support, greater legitimacy in the public perception, and a wider network through which to attract financial and informational resources, among others (Gawerc 2020). Moreover, research suggests this kind of coalition formation and bridge-building across vast ideological or cultural divides can successfully occur under certain conditions such as a sufficiently broad ideology or the presence of a shared space for interaction (Enriquez 2014; Van Dyke & Amos 2017). Potential avenues for micromobilization or coalition building in the absence of shared identity or framing (at least at the outset) thus merit investigation.

The energy transition (ET) movement away from fossil fuels is a fitting case in which to assess opportunities for alignment of disparate frames and collaboration across diverse cultural identities. Scholars have examined frames in the ET movement (Heffron & McCauley 2018; Wang & Lo 2021) and ideologies in fossil fuel dependent communities (Greenberg 2018; Haggerty et al 2018; Harrahill & Douglas 2018; Weller 2019). Fewer have devoted sustained attention to the possibilities for frame alignment between these spaces, although some studies have compared perspectives across communities (Cha & Pastor 2022; Graff, Carley & Konisky 2018). Similarly, some research has investigated identities within the environmental movement

(Ackland & O'Neil 2011; Curnow & Helferty 2018; Gibson-Wood & Wakefield 2013), as well as cultural norms or identities in fossil fuel communities (Bell & Braun 2020; Cha 2020; Lewin 2019). Yet, again, investigation of possibilities for collaboration across these spaces in the context of diverse identities is limited.

In short, these communities often attract attention separately in the literature. In some cases, academic literature has counterposed newer and more expansive frameworks for a just energy transition that focus on justice for environmental justice communities facing pollution and other impacts from fossil fuel production, on one hand with more "limited" frameworks that focus on fossil fuel dependent communities and workers, on another (Galgoczi 2020; Morena et al 2018). While some authors (Carley & Konisky 2020) as well as eco-Marxist theoretical frameworks (Foster, Clark & York 2010; Magdoff & Williams 2017) recognize the common struggle faced by communities like these, more work is needed to develop this kind of connective theory at the micro level in the particular contexts of individual communities.

To better understand cultural differences across stakeholders in the energy transition and how, theoretically, such differences could be bridged through a recognition of similarities in their structural position, I develop a qualitative analysis of two very different communities that are stakeholders in the energy transition: a rural community in eastern Montana with a substantial economic dependence on a local coal power plant and mine; and a hybrid virtual community composed of energy justice activists who advocated for the passage of Oregon's recent clean electricity legislation. About 1000 miles lie between these sites. If somebody wanted to, they could follow the power lines all the way from one to the other – a tangible reminder of the material interconnectedness between these two places. Yet it is not just power lines that link these places, but their mutual engagement in battles with what I will refer to collectively as

"energy capital" – corporate entities in the energy sector. Yet for being engaged in similar battles, the places don't *feel* that similar. In fact, the communities look, sound and feel very different. They talk about different issues, they use different language, and they function according to different norms and practices. These differences are contextualized in different histories and are indicative of broader cultural conflicts surrounding rurality and politics.

Regarding these communities I ask the following questions:

1) What similarities can be identified in the struggles these communities are facing?
2) What are key differences in beliefs, norms and values in these sites?
3) How might shifting or expanding the stories of struggle that are told in these communities lead to greater frame alignment and an opportunity for collaboration and coalition building? How might an expanded cultural toolkit (Swidler 1986) facilitate collaboration?

To answer these questions I engage in an investigation using insights from over one hundred hours of participant-observation and ethnographic observations, as well as interviews, conducted across the two field sites. I consider first the ways in which the two communities are both engaged in battles with energy capital. Second, I explore differences in cultural norms and discourse between these two communities. I contribute to literature on just transitions a relatively rare instance of juxtaposed ethnographic cultural observations of multiple stakeholder groups – including both voices that are and are not supportive of energy transition work. I also contribute to discussions within social movement literature on frame alignment and collective identity by considering how these processes could, theoretically, operate in two examples of communities that seem unlikely allies. I then discuss possible consequences that cultural differences between places like these can have for the energy transition movement. Findings suggest that a broadening and shifting of frame within the energy transition coalition in Oregon that

acknowledges the similarities between the struggles it faces and those faced by the community in Montana could open up possibility for (hypothetical) partnership. Additionally, I suggest such frame alignment could be particularly effective if carried out alongside attention to differences in cultural norms and habitus. These observations contribute to literature concerning energy transition and just transition bridging work and coalition-building.

Cultural Barriers to Bridging in Social Movements

With the "cultural turn" in social movement theory beginning in the 1980s (Williams 2004) came the understanding that, among other more structural constraints such as political opportunities and resources, similarities along cultural, social, and ideological dimensions tend to facilitate social movement activities – either within a group or within a coalition (Van Dyke & Amos 2017). More specifically, collective identity facilitates coalition formation (Van Dyke & Amos 2017) and successful social movement organizing outcomes at multiple levels (Polletta & Jasper 2001).

Collective identity, defined at the individual level, is one's "cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution" that entails a "perception of a shared status or relation" (Polletta & Jasper 2001:285). At the collective level it is the "shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity" (Taylor & Whittier 1992:105). The concept was expanded, with the proliferation of the "new social movements" of the mid-late 1900s, beyond stricter interest-based notions of collective identity developed from theories of class conflict, to reflect that social movement participation could not be predicted by class location (Polletta and Jasper 2001).

Collective identity is different from personal identity but can be a component of it (Polletta & Jasper 2001:285), and vast differences in personal identities may present an obstacle to collective identity formation. Shared meaning contributes to cohesion and communal identity (Fine 2010: 360). If vessels of cultural meaning such as norms, beliefs, values, language and symbolic repertoires differ greatly, agreement on shared meaning may be more elusive. In fact, "culture clashes" can occur when an individual's *habitus* does not align with a social movement space (Flesher Fominaya 2015). Habitus can be defined as "routinized, taken for granted, symbolic systems of meaning that individuals from shared locations have in common and that shape their interactions, within a given field of action" (Flesher Fominaya 2015: 6). Social movements or social movement organizations can inspire a particular habitus (Crossley 2003; Haluza-DeLay 2008; Husu 2013), as can groups with shared ideologies and practices (Ford 2019). If a potential new participant in a social movement does not possess that particular habitus they may feel that they do not "fit in" with the movement culture.

In light of these obstacles, little research examines circumstances under which achievement of collective identity (or, alternatively, collaboration despite its absence) across these kinds of cultural differences might be achievable. Most of the research that concerns bridging differences in norms and habitus has been conducted in the context of global and cross-cultural movements, as well as bridging across racial and ethnic divides (Flesher Fominaya 2010b; Flesher Fominaya 2015; Wessendorf 2010). Little research has attended to how cultural differences in habitus and norms might be transcended between stakeholder groups within the energy transition movement.

Alongside norms and habitus, frame alignment is a path to help achieve a collective identity (Snow, Veigelhart & Ketelaars 2019); collective identity can be reinforced or hindered

by frames. In a social movement context frames can be defined as the "interpretive packages that activists develop to mobilize potential adherents and constituents" (Polletta & Jasper 2001: 291). Frame alignment is the establishment of a shared frame, including identification of the problem and of protagonists, antagonists, and potential solutions (Polletta & Jasper 2001). A comprehensive social movement frame includes a diagnostic frame, a prognostic frame and a motivational frame. Frame alignment can be accomplished through mechanisms including frame extension, bridging, amplification, and transformation (Snow et al 1986).

Generally, frame alignment and shared culture are viewed as important components of a collective identity and helpful to social movement success. Yet social movement organizations (SMOs) may sometimes find themselves in a position in which it would be strategic to engage with potential supporters, or organizations that could potentially become coalition members, who currently lack an identity in common with the SMO – due either to circumstances being differently framed, or to differences in cultural norms or habitus. Attempting to bridge these divides is challenging (Gawerc 2020) and involves time and resources. However, it also has potential benefits to the movement's legitimacy, resilience and access to human and financial resources (Gawerc 2020). Successfully bridging cultural divides to connect with communities outside a social movement space means that social movements may be able to reach what McCarthy (1986) refers to as "unmobilized sentiment pools" – individuals who are not organized but who could become supportive of a movement.

While examples in the literature are not particularly common, scholars have documented cases in which collaboration occurred in a social movement context despite identity-based or ideological differences. In a study concerning a coalition for food safety, organizations worked together under the auspices of adjacent but separate ideologies or framings. In this instance, the

study author noted, these framing differences did not need to be subsumed under a more inclusive master frame; rather the different framings "instead helped make a broader coalition possible" (Haydu 2012: 106). Similarly, with a broad enough ideological tent, successful coalition can occur between groups across different social positions and identities (Enriquez 2014). In this case a broad ideology served as an "umbrella" that encompassed other narrower but compatible ideologies. This, in conjunction with the creation of a shared space to negotiate any conflict, enabled collaboration among citizen and undocumented college students (Enriquez 2014).

Scholarship on this subject generally suggests that there is, of course, a limit; it would not be expected that groups with viewpoints antithetical to each other would join in coalition (Van Dyke & Amos 2017: 5). However, viewpoints on a subject are dynamic and dependent on past and current cultural and material factors. Similarly, collective identity is a dynamic process (Flesher Fominaya 2010a). Thus, it is conceivable that frame alignment (Snow et al 1986) could generate opportunities for collective identity and collaboration where none existed before. In this chapter I identify frames used by each community I studied and identify potential pathways toward a broader framing that could, theoretically, link the disparate original frames and resonate in both cultural contexts.

Culture and the Energy Transition

In the context of the energy transition movement space, master frames have emerged to which other frames may connect, refer, or make a contrast. I will discuss two of these frames here: just transition as an integrated frame for justice (Wang & Lo 2021) on one hand, and energy transition as a socio-technical transition, on another. For organizations that consider "just

transition" an integrated frame for justice, the transition that is needed is not confined to energy sources but rather lies in the entire social, political and economic structure of society. Organizations who hold this view believe that an extractivist, capitalist political-economic structure is the root source of socio-ecological harms, and that comprehensive transformation is needed to attain ecological balance and right social injustices. Many organizations aligned with this approach are comprised of people who have historically experienced environmental and social injustices due to the fossil energy system. In this view, capital and allied powers are the opponent and, theoretically, the entire working class could be conceivable allies in a solidarity economy.

In other energy transition movement spaces advocates frame the energy transition as primarily a technical issue. Taking a much more limited approach, these advocates do not tie success in the energy transition to political-economic transformation but focus instead on measures such as carbon emissions and megawatts of coal still being burned. This approach grew out of the segment of the environmental movement that is primarily interested in climate change and the catapulting of climate change to the forefront of environmental concerns over the past several decades. Capital interests may be allies in this approach, so long as the energy they develop is clean and renewable. Anyone opposing conversion of energy sources from "dirty" to "clean" represents, in this view, an existential threat to society and the planet.

Within the just transition literature a contrast is often made between two frame variants based on their scope. One is focused primarily on security and well being for fossil fuel workers and communities that will be negatively impacted by the transition to renewable energy, which has been referred to as a "limited" version of a just transition. The other is framed as being more comprehensive and holistic, theoretically encompassing fossil fuel dependent workers and

communities as well as communities who have experienced the harms of fossil fuel pollution and extractive practices and historically marginalized communities more broadly. It focuses on broader issues of social, environmental and economic justice for these communities. Scholars have suggested the possibility of a framework that unifies these and other just transition frame variants: "While several theoretical frameworks on just transition exist, we found that advocates do not necessarily envision just transition within a single framework. Rather, ideas of just transition often cross several frameworks. We argue that, as a result, a more comprehensive framework that advances a more just society, overall, is able to address both the concerns of a labour-oriented framework and also frameworks that advocate for a broader social justice agenda" (Cha Pastor 2011:7).

While just transition frameworks are commonly used in the energy transition academic literature and heartily embraced in some energy transition movement spaces, they are explicitly avoided, and usage of the "just transition" terminology is sometimes vehemently denounced, in other energy transition stakeholder communities. Scholars have learned that it is not uncommon for members of fossil fuel dependent communities to express frustration with the framing (Cha 2020). From the perspectives of many people in these communities, an energy transition in which their livelihoods disappear and their communities are left economically devastated does not seem "just" – and they find that terminology offensive. In prior research (Cha & Pastor 2022), as well as in my own empirical work, other individuals working in the energy transition movement space avoid using the term "just transition" for more pragmatic reasons – either simply to avoid the contention surrounding it or due to its lack of a clear definition that their community members find meaningful.

For example, in the Powder River Basin coal-producing region of Wyoming, opposition to energy transition was found to be common (Cha 2020; Harfmann 2021). Cha (2020) found that some people in the community she studied attributed the decline in coal production and associated employment to, in part, a "war on coal" started by the Obama administration, while others attributed it to the decline in natural gas prices. Due to influence from political and capital interests (Farrell 2016; Jacques et al 2008) the energy transition has been politicized. Cha (2020) observed an emphasis on developing technologies to allow the continued mining for coal and the identification of new markets and other uses for it. In this framing, illustrated by the state's economic diversification document (Cha 2020:101657) the federal government was blamed, the state government was not held accountable, and rather it was private industry that was relied upon to heroically lead economic diversification efforts.

In the same region, similar perspectives existed alongside the perception that environmentalists who advocated for shifting away from coal had misplaced concerns – that they were "outsiders" and "do-gooders who don't understand" the "environmental labor" that coal miners in the area viewed themselves as performing as they engaged in their work (Harfmann 2021: 8). These perceptions developed from a combination of ideological manipulation on the part of the local coal industry, miners' experiences engaging in stewardship activities in their day-to-day labor, and cultural values (Harfmann 2021).

The different framings of energy transition, based on different lived realities as well as political and cultural influences, can influence the development of, and in turn also be influenced by, a particular cultural repertoire or habitus. Culture and habitus may look very different in different spaces across the energy transition – for example, an energy justice organization advocating for societal transformation, a renewable energy firm engineering carbon emissions

reduction technology, and a fossil fuel dependent community seeking to hold on to a major source of employment. While cultural differences between these kinds of spaces have not, to my knowledge, been systematically studied in the energy transition, some research on adjacent and related areas provides helpful and relevant insights.

For example, scholars have identified a "radical habitus" or "activist habitus" common across several social movements (Alam et al 2019; Alexander et al 2022). An ecological habitus, or eco-habitus, defined as "a sense that being 'green' is good and also achievable" (Huddart-Kennedy & Givens 2019:646) has been demonstrated among certain groups of environmentalists. An eco-habitus reflects the fact that within the environmentalist, environmental justice, energy justice, and energy transition communities are certain taken for granted assumptions about what is common topical knowledge and the way one should act in accordance with ecological values. Communities not involved in environmental movement work are not expected to share this habitus. Eco-habitus is also influenced by politics (Ford 2019), as well as class (Huddart-Kennedy & Givens 2019). Fossil fuel dependent communities in right-leaning regions may find an eco-habitus to appear even more foreign or strange.

Communities impacted by the energy transition vary widely in social and geographical location, and they can be expected to vary widely in culture and inhabitants' habitus. Rural-urban cultural differences are generally salient in this context, given that a great deal fossil fuel extraction infrastructure is located in rural areas (Ashwood & MacTavish 2016; Lievanos et al 2018), while other polluting facilities like processing plants or power plants are disproportionately located in poor communities, be they rural or urban (Simpson 2022). Urban and rural places differ in various aspects of culture including values and beliefs; for example, they exhibit differences, on average, in political orientation and environmental concerns

(Berengeur et al 2005; Hamilton et al 2014; Kelly & Lobao 2019). Due to differences in factors such as physical environment, recreational opportunities and preferences (Stedman & Heberlein 2001; Chen et al 2017), occupational trends (Matz, Stieb & Brion 2015) and other factors, it may be expected that rural and urban places also tend to be associated with differences in cultural norms. Of course, variation in each of these and other aspects even between communities located at the same point along the rural-urban continuum are also to be expected.

It is perhaps due in part to this variation that there have been no studies known to me, to date, that have systematically examined patterns in the cultures and habitus of fossil fuel dependent communities in the United States. From the perspective of energy transition organizations seeking to develop alliances with individuals in these communities, such information could be useful, as it could help make an organization better prepared to successfully navigate any potential cultural differences that may exist in various communities with which it seeks to collaborate.

Energy Capital: Accounts of Conflict

Literature has documented environmental, health, economic and social challenges faced by communities that host fossil fuel extraction facilities, refineries, export terminals and other fossil fuel infrastructure. Additionally, the fossil fuel economy has wreaked ecological havoc, including but not limited to inducing climate change, on communities across the country and the world (Foster, Clark & York 2010; Magdoff & Williams 2017).

Many studies of the direct impacts of fossil fuel infrastructure take place in mining communities. Scholars have described, for example, the consequences of mountaintop removal mining on streams and drinking water and nearby ecosystems, reduction of air quality, and risks

of leaking or breaking sludge impoundments; (Fox 1999; Ross, McGlynn & Bernhardt 2016; Tallichet 2014). In West Virginia, counties that host mountaintop removal mining have higher rates of mortality, cancer and birth defects (Tallichet 2014). While some communities are constrained by economic dependence on the mine in a monoeconomy (Tallichet 2014) others experience a perceived (constructed) community economic identity surrounding the local fossil fuel industry (Bell & York 2010). In many instances, dependence on a fossil fuel monoeconomy is also accompanied by social challenges such as higher rates of mental health and mental health-related mortality (Blanc et al 2024; Young et al 2023).

Outside of fossil fuel dependent communities, research has documented impacts of the fossil fuel-based energy system on environmental justice communities more broadly, or communities that suffer disproportionately the harms and lose out on environmental benefits of a particular practice or system. Scholars have documented the environmental and health harms faced in these communities (Agyeman et al 2016; Bullard 2018; Taylor 2000) and the ways in which they are targeted for siting of toxic fossil fuel infrastructure (Lievanos et al 2018).

More recently, the concept of energy justice has gained prominence as a goal in the just transition movement – specifically in the integrated justice framing of just transition. In energy justice communities people face energy shutoffs due to lack of energy affordability and blackouts resulting from failures and inequities in the centralized energy grid (Coleman et al 2023; Lievanos & Horne 2017; Sovacool, Carley & Kiesling 2024) Realizing energy justice entails making it so that energy is accessible, affordable, equitably distributed and collectively managed (Koirala et al 2016; Stephens 2019).

While most studies consider the impacts of the fossil fuel system either in a particular community or on a broader regional or nationwide level, fewer have taken a comparative

approach. Still fewer have juxtaposed communities that are differently situated either 1) along the fossil fuel commodity chain (i.e.: extraction, processing, distribution, combustion, consumption, waste handling); or 2) within the energy transition movement field structure (i.e.: deeply rooted in the movement – and if so, in what part of the movement – or disconnected from the movement entirely). These different locations may foster different perspectives toward energy capital. By "energy capital" I refer to corporations and other capital interests invested in the energy system – inclusive of "fossil capital" referred to by Andreas Malm (2016) and others but extended to also include capital involved in renewable energy sources. To be sure, communities positioned differently along the fossil fuel commodity chain see the fossil fuel system from different vantage points – they experience different parts of the system. Yet similarities in structural position become clearer, I hypothesize, when considered within a broader eco-Marxist framework.

Ecological Marxism locates the source of ecological imbalance and degradation in the capitalist political-economic system (Foster 2000; Foster, Clark & York 2010; Magdoff & Williams 2017). It is the exploitation and appropriation of labor and land – or, more broadly, human and natural systems – by capital that has generated a metabolic rift in social-ecological relations (which manifests as all forms of social and environmental ill: climate change, air and water contamination, high rates of cancer, the obesity and diabetes epidemics, high rates of mental illness, gun violence – to name a handful). This framework offers an explanation for the conflictual relations occurring in fossil fuel dependent communities as well as other environmental and energy justice communities impacted in all of the ways listed above, by energy capital. It provides a common story within which the stories of many particular struggles

fit. In other words, in that framework, all members of those impacted communities are on the same "team".

Scholars have applied eco-Marxist frameworks to a meso or micro scale, at the level of communities or regions (e.g.: Fox 1999). More work at this scale is needed to demonstrate how an eco-Marxist perspective can help re-frame particularized stories from communities situated differently in the energy transition movement space and along the fossil fuel commodity chain. Such work can contribute to the identification of bridge-building opportunities in the context of the energy transition.

Data and Methods

To investigate opportunities for frame alignment and navigation of differences in cultural norms between communities in the energy transition I engaged in a comparative case study of two communities – the Oregon Clean Energy Opportunity (OCEO) campaign in Oregon, and a fossil fuel dependent community, which I call Wilson, in rural Montana. While I compare these two cases I do not make causal statements about differences between the two; they are different types of spaces. The OCEO campaign is a social movement entity and exists within a social movement space. The campaign as well as my fieldwork within it took place primarily (though not exclusively) virtually. I use the term "community" when referring to OCEO to indicate the leaders and members involved in the campaign, who were participants in the campaign meetings. Wilson, on the other hand, is an actual residential community. These and other differences in the type of space inherently suggest they would have many differences in terms of the characteristics I attend to in this chapter.

However, it is that very fact that makes them interesting for my argument. Within and adjacent to the energy transition movement there are incredibly different types of spaces and communities. The two types I consider here, an energy transition movement campaign and a fossil fuel dependent community, are common within the movement space. The case of Wilson might suggest some of the kinds of frames and cultural norms that could be found in some other fossil fuel dependent communities that are in the process of decline, or that are in conflict with the local fossil fuel institution(s). The OCEO case might be similarly indicative of some of the frames and cultural practices one might encounter in other energy transition advocacy spaces. The selection of these two particular communities to study was not entirely arbitrary. I was aware at the time of case selection that some of the energy generated in Wilson was sent to Oregon, and I wanted to examine two communities that actually did have a material connection to each other.

Data came primarily from participant-observation in the two communities. My fieldwork with OCEO took place over the course of three years. As a result of constraints due to COVID at the time, the campaign took place almost entirely virtually using Zoom meetings. I participated in three parts of that campaign. The first part consisted of a five-session Energy Justice Leadership Institute (EJLI) Part I that took place between December 2020 and January 2021, which was primarily focused on teaching grassroots participants about the energy system. The second part of EJLI was called the Grassroots Action Teams, which took place weekly between January and July 2021. The Grassroots Action Teams component was focused on continuing to educate grassroots participants, but this time the content was more heavily focused on training for grassroots participation in the legislative process, both generally and specifically concerning three OCEO-promoted bills. After EJLI Part II I continued participation in the campaign's HB

2021 Community Advocates group, which was a smaller group that advised on implementation of the bills, from the perspectives of community members. This took place biweekly between October 2022 and October 2023. I also attended two Oregon Citizens' Utility Board (CUB) conferences to which I was invited as an OCEO participant in October 2022 and October 2023. At these conferences I was able to meet with fellow EJLI participants and leaders face-to-face, build camaraderie, and discuss energy-related issues in person.

I participated actively in sessions including contributing to conversations both in small and large group settings and asking questions. I did, however, wait until other participants had offered their input first, to reduce my influence on others' comments as much as I could. I also participated in practice exercises and actual participation in OCEO campaign events including providing testimony on a piece of legislation for a Public Utility Commission meeting and lobbying a representative to support one of the campaign's proposed bills. Data from participant observation activities are from either written field notes, review of meetings presentations and recordings, and general observations and insights gained from the experience of participating in the campaign. I was then able to combine these experiential and observational data with data from interviews with OCEO leaders, to learn about the campaign process from multiple perspectives. I audio recorded all interviews and transcribed them using Sonix software, and I used Atlas.ti for data analysis. I also reviewed some Powerpoint presentations and recordings from meetings.

My fieldwork in Wilson consisted of participant-observation conducted while residing in the community as well as in-depth interviews conducted with four key informants. For the interviews I talked to leaders in the community, who are actively engaging in this conflict. These people are making consequential decisions for their community, so while these interviews were

not intended to be representative of all people in Wilson, the perspectives of these particular people are helpful in assessing potential areas for frame alignment and cultural bridge-building work. Fieldwork occurred over a more compressed timeline of approximately one week but was more intensive than my work with the OCEO campaign. In addition to the formal interviews I attended two public meetings and a site visit with one of my study participants.

While I was in Wilson I observed and documented several aspects of the community in writing and with photographs. I paid careful attention to the types of businesses and amenities in the community, the appearance and "feel" of the neighborhoods, homes, and buildings, the layout of the town, and the pace of life. I observed how people spoke, behaved, and how they acted toward me. The mine and power plant infrastructure I photographed and recorded on video. During the public meetings I attended I paid attention to and took notes on how the meeting was structured, who spoke, what was said, attendees' appearances and behaviors, how many people were in attendance, and the overall "feel" of the meeting. In all of this fieldwork I attended to the types of concerns community members were articulating. From these observations I generated quick "jottings" as well as more detailed field notes developed after I was out of the field for the day.

In addition to more quantifiable observations I draw upon my visceral and embodied reactions and experiences from both field sites as a valid source of data, and I contextualize these data with understanding of historical political and cultural context. I engage in this work following qualitative researchers who have discussed the value of a researcher's emotions (emerald & Carpenter 2015) and embodied experiences (Hokkanen 2017) as data. In this chapter I draw upon my embodied and emotional responses to occurrences in each field site to explore what similarly positioned others might experience in a similar space. This kind of data from a

researcher's personal, experiential perspective is limited and imperfect – it is, in my view, an empirical starting point to be built upon with future study. I leverage my positionality as an "outsider with inside knowledge" in both spaces. As one of relatively few people who has some experience being in and observing both spaces, I consider this to be particularly important, as the particulars of framing and culture that may be only observable through ethnographic research methods could present barriers to communities working together.

Zooming in on these communities and their differences and similarities and studying them in a participatory way can help peel back cultural differences to uncover similar structures that theorizing alone may not. This work follows that of Little (2017), who uses ethnographic methods to explore the micropolitical ecology of people's experiencing of an industrial sacrifice zone – shifting attention from the macro idea of sacrifice zone to look at how it is navigated and experienced in a biopolitical and interactive way. In my research I demonstrate, as best I can, what it *felt* like to be in these spaces, from my positionality, and I discuss how this type of data can inform theory and practice on energy transition bridging work.

During data analysis I identified emergent themes using a modified abductive reasoning approach (Timmermans & Tavory 2012). This method can be compared with grounded theory methodology (Charmaz & Belgrave 2012) in that instead of taking an entirely inductive theoretical approach, it advocates for a hybrid inductive-deductive approach. Its founders acknowledge that much sociological qualitative analysis is in fact not conducted entirely inductively and that an abductive approach better captures the process that many scholars engage in in practice. In my case, I approached my analysis process with some preliminary thoughts about themes that I had heard during data collection, as well as some ideas concerning the theoretical concepts that could be useful. Nonetheless, I wanted to allow other insights to emerge

as well. I engaged in an iterative process of open coding and focused coding (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 2011), interspersed with reference to what was appearing to be relevant literature. Drawing upon social movement theoretical concepts including collective identity, framing and habitus. I describe the types of frames, language, symbols and norms that were expressed. I also contextualize these cultural indicators within broader cultural and political patterns pertinent to the energy transition and how these are influenced by institutions of power.

In the following section, I use data from these fieldwork experiences to identify 1) structural similarities between both communities vis-à-vis their relations with capital; 2) frames used by community members to make sense of these relations; and 3) cultural differences in norms and habitus between these two communities. I then consider potential avenues for frame alignment and navigation of cultural differences that could contribute to the development of a collective identity.

Similar Struggles: Confronting the Power of Energy Capital

As a symbolic testament to the broad reach of energy capital, and to the ways in which communities' struggles are interconnected, I actually encountered representatives of the same utility company both in Portland, Oregon, and in Wilson, Montana. In Portland a company representative was presenting at a conference hosted by the Oregon Public Utility Commission that I attended as part of my engagement with the Oregon Clean Energy Opportunity campaign, while in Wilson, a different representative of the company was attending a community meeting to discuss impacts of the power plant owners' potential exit on the community's water supply. As it turns out, the company was part owner of the plant, which supplies energy to, among other places, Portland.

In the remainder of this section I focus not on any particular connection, however, but rather on the more general characteristics of the conflicts between the communities in my two study sites and energy capital. In neither case was the conflict a blatant battle; rather they were more discreet and more complex tugs-of-war of power that were extractive in nature. Both communities faced environmental, economic and health threats, a troubling dependence on energy capital, and at the same time the necessity of working with energy capital to achieve their goals – themes which I illustrate in the following two case-specific subsections and return to in the subsequent summary subsection.

Oregon

The OCEO campaign was formed to achieve the passage of three bills pertaining to clean energy: Healthy Homes, Energy Affordability, and 100% Clean Energy for All (HB 2021). Healthy Homes aimed to address toxic air quality and building materials in housing stock – particularly among low-income and historically marginalized communities. While not directly related to fossil fuel infrastructure, health risks associated with toxins in building materials and air quality were considered in the context of other health and environmental threats faced by environmental justice communities that *were* due to the fossil fuel system such as climate change and the associated increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters. Additionally, the toxic impacts of natural gas use in homes were also on the minds of organizers during the time of OCEO – while not an emphasis of the campaign. These threats were also considered alongside high costs of energy – a direct consequence of the fossil fuel based energy system – which was the subject of the Energy Affordability Act. Residents of environmental justice communities – who comprised a large portion of the participants in the OCEO campaign – faced compounding

environmental threats to their health, in addition to rising energy costs. The interaction between these challenges was exemplified by participants noting the choice some people are forced to make between paying utility bills or medical bills.

While the Health Homes and Energy Affordability Acts did not attract a great deal of controversy during the OCEO campaign, the 100% Clean Energy For All bill (HB 2021) involved extensive advocacy efforts and discussions and negotiations on the part of advocates, legislators and other government officials, the state's Public Utility Commission (PUC) and investor-owned utility companies (IOU)s that would be impacted by the proposed legislation. Organizers encountered energy capital primarily in the form of the IOUs Pacific Power and Portland General Electric (PGE). While IOUs and their profit margins (Wilson, O'Boyle & Lehr 2020) are regulated by state governments or their proxies (utility commissions such as the Oregon PUC), they are for-profit entities. Public utility commissions set rate ceilings and regulate programs and resources they use. However, utilities, are essentially legalized monopolies (Harrison 2020; Peskoe 2021) (as well as monopsonies – analogous to a monopoly but among buyers of a good or service rather than sellers) (Wilson, O'Boyle & Lehr 2020) and have a tremendous amount of power in the utility resource and transmission/distribution planning processes.

In part, this power comes from their monopoly status and their reliability mandate. Because utilities provide an essential public service, they are required to structure their transmission and distribution infrastructure and processes to maximize reliability – or to reduce the likelihood or severity of outages. In cases where utilities want to achieve or prevent a particular policy prospect, they may seek to find a way to justify their preference as a means to improve reliability. The technical nature of utility resource and transmission and distribution

planning also helps to entrench and reinforce utility power. In meetings with the PUC or the public, utility officials often also possess a monopoly on the technical knowledge involved in various aspects of utility planning. As we saw in Chapter II, this can constrain participation and bridge-building opportunities.

In the OCEO campaign, utilities mounted opposition to provisions they opposed through subtle tactics to control scope of what was in the bill – recalling Lukes' (1974) discussion of how entities in power will aim to control the scope of a conversation or negotiation. For example, the position of the IOUs on the HB2021 bill was not outright opposition; as they stated in submitted testimony, they ultimately ended up supporting it, and they noted they were already making many of the requested changes anyway. Rather, the pushback OCEO advocates encountered was more subtle, as the utility companies contested details of the bill and its implementation. The IOUs were attempting to minimize impacts to their processes and profits as well as prevent broader change that could threaten their continuity. For example, they pushed back on labor standards by increasing the minimum project size that would require compensation at the prevailing union wage. They also attempted (successfully) to weaken requirements for community energy projects. Energy transition nationally is creating opportunities for decentralization (Baker, Hook & Sovacool 2021), and IOUs stand to lose in decentralization. There is debate about whether increasing levels of distributed solar, for example, could eliminate the existence of IOUs altogether (Borenstein & Bushnell 2015: 23). Utility companies globally have been slow to embrace decentralization (Frei et al 2018).

Outside of the policy process, and in communities, the monopoly nature of the fossil-fuel based public utility system fosters lack of resilience, in conjunction with dependence on the utilities for an essential service. I suggest that the relationship between communities and utility

companies is extractive in nature. Dealing with the impacts of outages or shutoffs extracts valuable time and human resources from communities. Community owned energy generation resources, in contrast, could power communities and maintain their lifestyles, safety, and economic productivity even when broader utility networks were impacted. Moreover, financial resources are extracted from communities to pay for electricity. In contrast, alternative energy provisioning structures such as community based energy would keep those financial resources in communities, and perhaps develop additional community-generated wealth.

That the utility companies were a passive yet consistent adversary to campaign advocates became evident in my observations and interviews. During meetings, organizers portrayed IOUs as essentially the opponent of communities. For example, when discussing why clean energy standards were used in the construction of the HB 2021 bill instead of an alternative standard - the renewable portfolio standard (RPS), leaders noted that RPS is cost effective for utilities, while clean energy standards are cost effective for communities. Leaders expressed frustration with the utilities and held utility companies up next to industry actors as culprits in opposing energy transition. Nonetheless, advocates had to work with them in the policy sphere.

Given their vertical integration and investment in and ownership of energy resources (including fossil fuel resources), IOUs are key players alongside other fossil fuel industry corporations in a broader extractivist process that harms communities, which I discuss in the next section.

Montana

"Well, there it is!" I thought as I turned off the highway into Wilson for the first time. That's the power plant. The town's main entrance from the highway featured a sign bearing the

town's name, beyond which one could see, rising above the gas station and convenience store at the town's entrance, the smokestacks of the plant. As I drove and walked around town throughout my time in the community, the plant was an ever-present part of the skyline. From the city hall you could see it. If you walked out the library door, there it was. If you were to stand in the central town park, it was just a block or two away. I was amazed at how close one could get to the plant; the nearest street to it was no more than fifty yards from the building. It was as if the power plant were a large tree, and residential neighborhoods were later filled in amongst its roots. It was truly integrated into the town – or rather, the town was built around it. Residents are aware of this history. A local politician I spoke with explained to me "You know, this town before the plants got here and before the mine came in here in earnest, this was a spot on the road. K? None of these houses, none of these people, none of these facilities were here or would have been here had these plants not come here."

The community in Wilson interacted with energy capital in the form of the companies that owned and operated this plant, as well as the mine just outside of town. The primary owner of the power plant was, at the time, an investment company that I will call Tanner. However, at least five other companies shared interest in the plant, including several that provided power to Oregon and Washington. The relationship between the power plant and the town was primarily extractivist in nature.

During my time in Wilson I learned that the power plant used to have four units, opened in the 1970s, but two had since shut down. Sitting in the shadow of the power plant, I met at a local park with a power plant worker and union leader, Mike, who explained the relations between the company and the town. At the time of the shutdown of the two units, a large campaign was undertaken and backed by the company, what Mike called a misinformation

campaign. In fact, he nicknamed the campaign “Company United” instead of “Wilson United”. Wilson United effectively got the union’s business manager removed from his leadership position. At the time I was there, some part-owners of the power plant were seeking to exit from their ownership role in the plant. Tanner was, at the time, intending to keep their ownership share, as was another part-owner. Two others, centered in the Pacific Northwest, were seeking to leave the community and not retain any liability once they left. Two more were “on the fence”.

Mike was aware that the company had no intention of sticking around any longer than was good for its bottom line. “That's what Tanner’s done since they've been here,” he said. “Their whole business model is to go out of business. But I saw this when I was on the West Coast in the paper mills. We're going to go from investment group, they're going to diddle around, to investment [group], to investment group, and until this community says, bullshit, we're worth something, it's just…going to go like this.” The companies were not forthcoming with information regarding their intentions. In fact, the timing of shutdown became a bargaining chip in negotiations with the union at the power plant. Mike told me that at their union’s last executive board meeting, “I looked at our business managers – we’re looking at a contract coming up – and I said, if these bastards won’t tell us when this thing’s going down, they won’t give us a shutdown date” that he would make one up and tell all the other employees. At least then the union would have a timeline to plan for. He added, “and to be fair to the management team here, they don't know either. They're trying to make sure we're the cheapest coal out of all the coal. So that they can be the last one running.” In Wilson, the owners of the company possessed a monopoly over information regarding the timing of shutdown, or what factors would trigger a shutdown. Much like in Oregon, energy capital seemed to hold the cards. However, unlike in Oregon, this community did not seem to have ready paths forward through that power.

The extractive nature of this relationship was evident to both Mike and Ray, a local politician. Mike told me, “That's how these investment groups work. They're just here for five, ten years. And “Whoosh!” they already [got] paid, what, 65% quicker than what they were going to do. [They] already made their – what they wanted out of this. They're good. They're going to – they'll dump us, so long as there's a market for it.” Ray expressed a similar sentiment: “They’ve taken a lot of dollars out of this community. They’ve taken a lot of resources out of this community. And I don’t feel like they put back near enough compared to what they’ve taken.”

Tanner sought to extend its extractive relationship with Wilson even after it left town. It wanted to make its escape without having to provide Wilson with a guarantee of an ongoing supply of clean water, the legality of which was debated at one of the public meetings I attended. Tanner also wanted to escape liability for any environmental or social harms, but at the same time wanted to retain exclusive rights to use the power lines that ran from the power plant out of town, holding the lines (and the community) “hostage”. Ray explained, “That's an attitude that the buyers leaving have. They're not going to relinquish anything that keeps them whole, you know? And then they want to be able to possibly tie into wind farms or something here, but dump this place, you know, trash these people. We're not going to give up any advantage we have that we can still make money off of what was put in place for the purpose of these plants.”

Like many similar companies, Tanner was extractivist in other aspects of its business practices too numerous to discuss here, including deskilling, specializing, and outsourcing to depress wages. Additionally, the economic structure of the region fosters an economic dependence on the company. Mike told me, “People are waking up to [Tanner].” He estimated, “I would say 80% of the [union] membership knows that [Tanner]'s bad.” He explained how the company has limited [raises] to pay for [health care]. Noting the high cost of living in Wilson, he

said, “This whole place is a façade.” Housing values are low, but groceries are so expensive they need to travel to the nearest larger town, which I will call Wrigley, to go shopping. “We spend exorbitant amounts. This grocery store [in Wilson] is four times the price of what it needs to be. So what do we all do? We jump in the car. We laugh that Wrigley costs $100 an hour. In which case it's usually more than that. If you can get out of Wrigley for under $100 an hour, you're doing pretty good. You know, we're all running and hauling all of this stuff back. So you cannot - the grocery store [in Wilson], for the most part, eggs, milk, they sell a lot of ice cream because that's kind of tough to haul from all over.”

Additionally, the low housing costs are a double-edged sword – particularly in the face of imminent plant shutdown and layoffs. Mike continued: “You know, there's people, there's, there's some people that are waking up going, so I spent $125,000 for my house and I can't sell it for $80,000 right now. People are waking up and [saying] ‘Whoa, whoa, whoa. So I got to move to Wrigley.’ The average house, it's $400,000 in Wrigley. How do they even afford that?” Then employees and their families get stuck because “that house for $400,000 in Wrigley is now unaffordable. And I didn’t accrue any wealth. I put it into tires and gas and vehicles that run down to nothing.” He said, “Yeah, you walk around with cash in your pocket, but, God, there's. There's a huge cost.”

The cost of Tanner’s extractive relationship with Wilson was not just financial, either. Aside from aiming to leave the community high and dry, literally, the company wanted to leave behind a toxic environmental mess. Poor water quality, from mining and coal ash ponds were major issues being addressed in the community. The coal ash ponds in Wilson had been constructed years ago, one for each unit of the power plant. Since then, they had begun leaking and contaminating the water supply for the surrounding communities, including the ranching

community. At the time of my fieldwork, remediation plans for the ash ponds were being discussed with the state of Montana.

A local rancher I spoke with, Andy, described the problem the mine and power plant had created regarding water. “The most valuable resource that we in agriculture have here is water - both quality and quantity. And we value that water very highly, no matter if it falls out of the sky, if it's a reservoir or if it's an aquifer in a coal seam that we have, we value the quality and quantity of water. The industry, on the other hand, looks at water as an obstacle. It's a problem. What do we do with it?” One of several instances of water contamination on the part of the local coal industry is illustrative:

> They are violating our water rights, water quality and quantity…I'll use the Samsonite ravine as an example, when they said that – when they mined in there, they reclaimed and the stream came back and was so contaminated, it was literally killing cattle. Cattle were dying because of drinking the water because of high sulfates. They said, ‘Well, that water never was any good anyway.’ They didn't do any pre-mine baseline to know what that water quality was, so they could get away with it. But we called them on it, said, look, there were cottonwood trees growing there, there were ash trees growing there. If the water was that – as bad as you're saying, as bad as it is now, nothing would have been growing.

In this example, not only is the industry contaminating the water but it also willfully and deceitfully tries to avoid responsibility for cleaning up the resource damage it had done.

As one might expect, issues of water contamination also breed concerns about health. I asked Mike about water-related health concerns. “I don't know if that's actually a huge problem here or not…” I began to say. Mike laughed as he responded:

> It depends on who you talk to. And I'm going to tell you, a lot of kids, a lot of – a lot of people that I grew up with…I think somebody should look at cancer rates in this town…I didn't believe that ‘til [it occurred to me] – wait a minute every one of the – every woman in this area has had some form of tumors, cancer. I got a friend of mine, 48. He's dying of cancer, right. Grew up here. Somebody needs to look at that. I don't know if it's true or not, but…And it's not the black lung like they talk about in Pennsylvania…I don't drink

> [the] water because I think Wilson's water sucks quite frankly. And I did when I was a kid.

While I did not collect data on the prevalence of health issues, or the prevalence of the perception of disproportionately high rates of illness in the area, Mike's concerns and observations demonstrate that the perception does exist in the community.

All of these forms of extraction take time and energy for community members to deal with – the stress of possible health problems, uncertainty about livelihood and being "stuck", the fight to protect water for people and livestock. Just like in Oregon, the community's human resources are being drained. Andy, the rancher, described his frustration and exhaustion with ongoing battles with energy capital. For him, this took place partly in the context of his work with a local community organization. "I'm so sick of going to meetings and pre-meeting meetings and conference calls and all of this kind of stuff because, gosh, I wanted to go, you know, maybe see [my daughter] when she was in school. 'Ah I can't do it. I got a meeting the next day'….It is…it is grueling. It's – you've got to do it because nobody else will. But there's a cost that comes with it. It does, it..it would have made an old man out of me if it hadn't ended when it did." In addition to health, environmental and economic extraction, energy capital is also engaged in the extraction of human resources in the form of people's time and physical and emotional energy.

Similar struggles

The communities in the OCEO campaign and in Wilson were each involved in extractive relationships with energy capital that had important parallels. Extractivism concerns "socio-ecologically destructive processes of subjugation, depletion, and non-reciprocal relations" that

entail the appropriation of natural or human resources (Chagnon et al 2022:762). Both communities experienced environmental and health threats. In Oregon, these consisted of broader threats from climate change and related natural disasters, alongside the ways in which economic hardship could impact health outcomes if people in low-income communities were faced with choices between paying energy bills or medical bills. These challenges were also viewed in the context of, and as associated with, other environmental and health harms faced by these environmental justice communities. In Montana, the community faced direct threats to its water quality and quantity, as well as health problems that participants speculated were likely related to water quality problems.

Both communities also experienced dependence on the extractive entity. In Montana, this took the form of dependence on jobs to continue to pay for houses which were difficult to sell because of their rural location with little employment opportunity, and which were also additionally devalued as a result of pollution from the mine. Community members were, in the words of several participants, stuck. The company held the power lines leaving the community "hostage" so the community could not use those as a potential revenue source; additionally, the community was dependent on the company for maintenance of its current water supply. In Oregon, members of the OCEO community were, like others in the state, dependent on the IOUs for energy, as IOUs occupied a monopoly position and successfully blocked efforts to strengthen provisions in the campaign's legislation for community-owned energy projects.

Lastly, both communities were effectively forced to work with their respective representatives of energy capital in some way. In Oregon, OCEO member organizations ultimately worked in collaboration with utility company representatives to come to policy agreements. Doing so instead of taking an uncompromising stance allowed the OCEO campaign

to declare policy victories, even though some important details and nuances of what they originally sought were not attainable. In Montana, workers who were not prepared to seek other employment (which would likely require relocation) needed to continue to accept their position relative to the company. Likewise, the community as a whole continued to allow the company to operate in an extractive and deceptive manner – in part because it was thought to be better than the alternative of the company leaving completely.

Cultural Barriers: Differences in Framing and Norms

Alongside these commonalities in the extractive relationships faced by these communities are important differences in the framings and meanings given to these extractive relationships. Additionally, in the communities I observed differences in cultural norms, values, symbols and habitus. Cultural differences can inhibit smooth social interaction and, specifically, collaboration in social movement contexts. Importantly, there is no existing or latent effort between the two particular communities I studied to join forces and collaborate – nor do I anticipate there being any such effort. Rather, I consider these cases as examples of other communities across the energy transition movement space that have *similarities with* these particular communities. What follows is a primarily theoretical exercise using empirical data to predict barriers that would likely exist, should collaboration efforts arise between places *like* these, in the future.

Cultural Barriers: Framing, Beliefs and Language

People in these communities framed their experiences with energy capital differently. Perhaps unsurprisingly, since the OCEO campaign was part of a social movement, I observed a more cohesive framing there than I did in Wilson. Frames in these communities arose from

different stories and beliefs and drew upon different symbolic repertoires. Existing differences in framing would likely create obstacles to the formation of collective identity for communities in spaces like these, but they also illuminate opportunities for frame alignment.

Oregon

The framing of the OCEO campaign exhibits all the components of a comprehensive social movement frame: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames. Concerns immediately relevant to the campaign, which also comprised the campaign's diagnostic frame, pertained to energy; several participants in the OCEO campaign shared stories of the extreme steps they took to be energy conscious out of necessity when they couldn't afford more electricity. For example, one individual shared how they adjusted their schedule to use electricity only during certain hours of the day to avoid peak pricing. These energy-related issues are situated within broader master frames of environmental justice and just transition. The OCEO campaign saw its members' communities as having experienced historical distributive environmental injustices (McCauley & Heffron 2018), particularly in the context of the energy system– a disproportionate share of environmental burdens alongside disproportionately few benefits.

The remedy to historic disempowerment in the energy system was to secure more power for communities, to seek procedural justice (McCauley & Heffron 2018) by enabling community members to have greater input in utility processes. These priorities comprise the campaign's prognostic frame and called upon members of historically marginalized environmental justice communities to build collective power and use that power to fight for energy justice. It included tasks such as building knowledge, skill and capacity within community, or, as one campaign

leader put it: “growing the bench”. It also included seeking policy level solutions such as gaining assurance for community owned and operated energy projects.

During the OCEO campaign and in the Energy Justice Leadership Institute (EJLI), organizers posed the question to participants: “Who should control energy?” The consensus among organizers and participants was that consumers, frontline communities, and indigenous people should control energy. One of the organizers told the history of energy in Oregon and how it tended to be implemented and controlled in a top-down, centralized manner. Early energy sources came from federal dam and other large-scale energy projects, many of which stole resources from indigenous populations. In telling this history, the organizer contrasted these energy structures with a system in which communities owned and controlled their own energy. Organizers also critiqued the lack of focus on communities and the “human dimension” of energy in the utility companies’ planning processes and in the Public Utility Commission’s regulatory processes. They contrasted utility companies’ reliance on calculations of cost effectiveness of various energy sources and processes with the question the OCEO campaign members thought she be prioritized – “is it a benefit to a human being?” Similarly, the idea that environmental justice community members’ time, insights and opinions were valuable was echoed again and again by OCEO leaders. Many OCEO participants received stipends to participate, an aspect of the campaign that OCEO leaders considered essential not only in retaining participants but in appropriately and respectfully compensating them for their labor.

Reflecting their motivational frame, OCEO leaders and members expressed a sense of rightful deserving of services at CUB conferences and in EJLI meetings. One participant notably said of the utility company representatives and Public Utility Commission members, “They work for us”, suggesting to their fellow OCEO participants that they should not hesitate to take up the

time of those representatives, ask questions of them, and share their stories with them. This sense of righteousness also drew upon emotional trauma experienced by community members who had faced challenging trade-offs between allocating a limited budget to energy or other crucial expenses, and the humiliation associated with that experience.

The frame in the OCEO campaign fit well within just transition and environmental justice master frames. The people involved in the campaign saw their work as part of a larger struggle for reinvestment in communities that have historically experienced environmental, economic and other injustices as part of a comprehensive, holistic just transition. These communities were termed "frontline communities" – on the "front lines" of these injustices, those who, as OCEO organizers said, were "hit first and worst" by not only the direct impacts of fossil energy pollution and disinvestment but also more indirect impacts of consequences such as climate change, including climate change induced natural disasters.

Their view of energy justice was comprehensive in that it included social and economic justice. While utility companies used the term "reliability" in a limited, reductionist and technocratic way to indicate whether there were sufficient electrons in the power grid to meet demand at any given time, OCEO participants used the term "resilience", which they referred to much more comprehensively. Resilience included not just sufficient power but whether it was actually accessible and affordable to people, along with all of the social infrastructure people needed to be able to use that power and live comfortably.

In the conflict as framed by the OCEO campaign, the target is the technology, the industry and, more broadly, the political-economic system. It appears, however, that in this particular manifestation of that framing, with the system go the people working within it. From my observations, workers at power plants and mines – places upstream in the fossil fuel

commodity chain – did not have any apparent place in this framing of the conflict. OCEO leaders introduced during EJLI the just transition concept and helped define and illustrate it using a graphic created and distributed by Movement Generation and Climate Justice Alliance, organizations headquartered in the San Francisco Bay area in California that are thought leaders in the just transition. The graphic illustrates a view of just transition aligned with the comprehensive, whole-systems transformation frame, developed as a response to historic disinvestment and inequalities and environmental harms. Part of that graphic refers to fossil fuels, and the graphic says, "Stop the bad/build the new", referring to closing down fossil fuel infrastructure and transitioning to renewable and clean energy sources. While this framing accurately captures the harms of fossil fuels, it does not differentiate between the capital power controlling the fossil fuel system and the workers and residents of fossil fuel dependent communities operating within that system. The framing of fossil fuels as simply "bad" may make good sense in the context of the historical experiences of environmental justice communities in Oregon. However, it conflicts with the framings found in Wilson, Montana.

Montana

In Wilson, the discursive environment was different. Since the community members I spoke with and interacted with were not involved in a dedicated collective action effort and were differently positioned within and around the community of Wilson, there was no single coherent, comprehensive frame that emerged; rather, there were several of what I will call "nascent" frames – collections of beliefs, based in a narrative, that could potentially crystallize (Snow, Vliegenthart & Ketelaars 2018) into a frame under the right circumstances. I refer to these as nascent frames because they have not developed into a full collective action frame, including

diagnostic, prognostic and motivational components, linked with a social movement. They contain some elements – often a diagnostic frame but no prognostic frame. One unifying thread tying these frames together is that in none of them did I encounter the term "just transition."

In one nascent frame, diagnostic concerns center primarily on the uncertainty of continued employment and the sustainability of the community itself. According to this account the people of Wilson have worked hard so that other people in other parts of the country could have electricity. The adversaries in this nascent frame were people from the states of Washington and Oregon because those are states that voted in recent statewide clean electricity targets to mandate the gradual elimination of fossil fuels from the supply provided by the state's major utility companies. In fact, in Oregon, the HB 2021 clean electricity bill that the OCEO campaign helped pass was an updated version of a previous set of targets of this same kind of policy. According to this nascent frame, it is these kinds of policies that prompted Pacific Northwest utility companies to move toward reducing fossil fuel resources in their resource inventories – leading to the prior shutdown of two of the units at Wilson's plant, and the future shutdown of the remaining two.

When I suggested to Ray, the politician in Wilson, that some of the activists in Oregon working on energy transition issues are familiar with the kinds of things Tanner does to the community, his response was sobering. "They don't know," he said quietly. "Their sole focus is 'We want to get rid of coal' and they don't care what it takes to do that." He continued:

> The people on the West Coast do not - I don't want to see anybody [from] Washington or Oregon in this town. I don't like seeing them on the highway. I don't like encountering them anywhere because either they know and they don't care or they weren't intelligent enough to find out exactly the consequences of what they're voting for and trying to help the people that are being affected by what they're doing. We gladly sent you guys power for the last 40 years, 50 years. And now: 'Oh, too bad. See you later.' No, I don't think they really do know. Or do they care? So you might believe they care. I don't believe they care. And most people I know don't believe they care.

He expressed his desire for his community to retaliate against places like Washington or Oregon, but he also acknowledged the inability to do so. “I just want to see the first time you end up with a huge blizzard, a polar vortex like happened in Texas hits that area because guess what's going to happen? We're going to tell you guys to go fly a kite. I promise, we're not sending you a nickel of power. Okay? We can't do that. If we were to shut those plants down at a time - even now, but at a time when power was hugely necessary in the West Coast, if we just shut them down, said no, that's an act of terrorism [on the part of] whoever shut them down.”

In this framing, people in Oregon and Washington – perhaps even more saliently than the fossil fuel industry – are seen as “takers” in the extractive economy – using the energy that the people in Wilson sacrificed environmental, health and, in some ways, economic well being to provide. Along the same lines, the consistency of the people in these states as environmentalists was questioned by Mike, the power plant union member I spoke with. “You, Washington and Oregon, [one of the power plant companies seeking to leave Wilson], you came into Montana, plopped down a big turd, and then you're just walking away…Yeah. [You] claim you're environmentalists…just in-your-yard environmentalists,” he said, laughing. The “turd” he was referring to includes the power plant and the environmental and health problems that come with burning coal, including the local coal ash ponds. He implies here that people from places like Oregon and Washington, as users of power supplied by utility companies that had ownership stakes in the power plant in Wilson, are partly to blame for the actions of those companies.

The variability among people in these states does not enter into this frame. In different versions of it the people are seen, collectively, as environmentalists forcing the hand of the utility companies toward renewable energy, or as environmental hypocrites who will pollute someone else’s backyard to preserve their own. In each case they tend to be thought of homogeneously – a

possible result of the fact that the effects on Wilson of the states' actions are the same regardless of any within-state internal variation.

A second nascent frame emerged in my conversation with Ray – the same person who said he could not stand seeing people from Oregon and Washington in his town. He had been explaining to me the conflict surrounding Tanner and the other companies wanting to sell their interest in the power plant but retain exclusive rights to the power lines running from it to the main transmission lines leaving the town. He said, "So they're holding all of this, they're holding all of this hostage and they're using the ratepayers and the voters of Oregon and Washington as the excuse as to why they have to leave. Of course it is their fault, but, but they're hiding behind all of you guys saying, "well, it's not us," except for you…look at the ethics of what they're doing. It is…it is on them." He knows the company's deceitful practices as well as any "West Coast" environmental activist. In this nascent frame, which Ray, holds simultaneously with the other competing frame, the company is the main villain victimizing both Wilson and the West Coast environmentalists, with the latter also serving as the scapegoat.

This account was echoed by Mike, the power plant worker, in a story he told me about the time Units One and Two were shut down in Wilson.

> The company and Sierra Club made a business agreement – because those two, One and Two, could be running right now. They haven't been for a couple of years, right? They entered into a business agreement that said – the owners [of the power plant] walked out [of their negotiations] and said, 'Hey, we just needed - we're shutting it down. We just needed a longer date [until shutdown] than what we [had]. We negotiated that with Sierra Club. We're good. We're out. We're happy.' But that's not what the workforce heard. They heard, 'Them rotten environmentalists shut down One and Two!' And if you talk to people around, that's what they'll tell ya, that's what they believe. It's not what happened. And then…what did Sierra Club do? They turned around and said, 'We got 'em!! We got 'em, give us money, we got 'em!' And they're lying too… That ain't true. None of that's true. I mean, I've got copies of court testimony from the CEO of Tanner at the time…And what it was, it was a case [in which Tanner] was saying, 'Hey, look, we don't need to pay for Sierra Club's attorneys. This is why - we just negotiated a longer [date until

> shutdown]'. I mean, that was sworn testimony. We put it on the job site. People still don't believe it.

According to Mike, the companies manufactured this kind of rhetoric, which was also reinforced by conservative news media and then-President Donald Trump.

In this nascent frame, the blame for the community's impending economic challenges is shifted toward energy capital. Andy, the rancher I spoke with, added to this blame the failure of the mine and power plant to care for the water and land. He contrasted their approach to his as a rancher: "But we have to – every decision we make now on how to operate a ranch, I have to think about…how is this going to impact the next generation? And I don't think the extractive industries look [at it] that way. It's tomorrow. It's not ten, twenty, thirty years down the road." Extractive industry entities, concerned almost exclusively as they are with their current profits, he argued, do not feel any obligation to consider their impacts in the future. In fact, they often escape responsibility for those impacts. He told a story in which ranchers who had lived on the land warned the mine, correctly, that their waste storage tank would not last due to its geological siting:

> …And forty years later, what do you know? We were right. The people that made that decision, they're gone. They're dead, they're retired. They don't live here anymore. They're not held accountable. But people that still live here, me being the second generation, are having to deal with this mess…That is offensive to us because we were here long before [the industry] ever got started and we are the ones now that are paying for it. And that is not right. You know, we're collateral damage. It's a very sparsely populated area. And we've even had people in our own industry tell us, 'Well, yeah, you guys are kind of taking it in the teeth down there. But really, Montana as a whole is better because of economic development, because of tax base and because of jobs'...We can do it right if…the laws that they were supposed to abide by are enforced by the state and federal agencies.

Andy calls out the way that energy capital successfully sought permission to pollute the water resources that ranchers and the rest of the community depended on. He refers to himself and

other local ranchers as “collateral damage” and believes that the mine and power plant have not acted responsibly.

The nascent framing concerning corporate accountability revealed just a hint of a more general critique of capital, among some participants. While, again, not representative of perspectives in Wilson as a whole, these critiques are useful in considering opportunities for frame alignment, at least among segments of the population in a community like Wilson. When Ray, the politician, was telling me about the irresponsibility of the coal industry in Wilson, he explained, “Well, they've all got stockholders and they have an obligation to provide a positive flow of cash and a dividend to the stockholders. That's one aspect of the type of country we live in, ya know?” He continued to discuss the tendency of companies to not clean up their messes: “And it's not really the fault of them. The fault is in...we're trying - everybody is trying to make their profit” – clearly an observation about the capitalist system, though not explicit and not overtly critical. The power plant worker pointed out to me the systemic nature of the capitalist system more explicitly: “The U.S. has a problem that it doesn't care about people. That is kind of at the root that - we care about corporations. We don't care about people.”

I spoke with Jim, a leader of the nearby Native American community whose reservation was located about a half hour from Wilson, and he expanded this framing to encompass broader social and ecological imbalance. Having resided in the area far longer than Wilson has been a community, the Tribe’s[1] continuity was not threatened by imminent power plant closures, Jim believed. Rather, he described how people from the Tribe who had gone to work at the power plant became, essentially, brainwashed, into thinking that money is happiness. They were taught to think this way, he said, not by the company but by the broader system in which the company

[1] I refer to Jim’s community using the terminology that he used.

operated. The origin of this system, which had come to him in a dream, he told me, was money – and specifically the supreme importance humans imbue it with.

Jim interpreted the extractive relationship of the power plant with both the communities of Wilson and the Tribal reservation in the context of historical trauma still felt by his people as a result of acts of appropriation, expropriation and exploitation to which they had been subjected over many generations. He felt that "healing from the heart" was needed to recover from social ills that had been brought to his community, as well as the world's ecological ills, which he described having learned of in a spiritual manner, through communications he was able to have with natural beings such as plants and animals.

The nascent framings of conflict with capital in Wilson are wide-ranging and do not map neatly onto a single just transition approach or social movement frame. However, they present opportunities for frame alignment. A common theme running throughout, even in the nascent frame in which blame is placed more on out-of-state environmentalists than on the company, is a value of social responsibility, responsibility to each other, and relationships. In the first nascent frame discussed above, it is the feeling of broken trust, a broken reciprocity, between energy provisioning communities and recipient communities that fueled the anger Ray expressed. From the perspective of Andy, the rancher, mining and coal production "can be done right", but only if done responsibly with appropriate government-led enforcement of regulations. Certainly, there is plenty of evidence that the power plant company betrayed its social responsibility to its employees and to the community. Jim's vision of change is more transformative but also more personal – the healing, he said, must start from within people.

Comparing Frames

The frames and nascent frames in the OCEO campaign and in Wilson are clearly very different, and they evolved from different histories. In each, different protagonists were fighting for different things. In OCEO, the protagonists were "frontline communities," or those who are "hit first and worst" by environmental injustices, including those enacted by the fossil energy system. The struggle for energy justice was framed as environmental, economic, and social, in a just transition framework. Nascent frames in Wilson centered the community of Wilson as the protagonist but assigned blame for the community's challenges variably to local coal industry entities or to environmentalists from out of state.

Meanwhile, members of both communities – in the OCEO campaign and in Wilson – considered themselves collateral damage – as stated outright by Andy in Wilson and implied in the framing of the OCEO campaign. Recognition of mutual participation as communities exploited by an extractive system may be grounds on which to build a solidaristic collective frame and collective identity. Each community's frame effectively ends where the power lines begin. The fact that each community faces a faceless energy infrastructure controlled by extractive energy capital when they look toward each other may inhibit mutual relations and understanding of the human experiences of the other community.

Cultural Barriers: Norms and Habitus

In addition to differences in how conflict relative to energy capital was framed in these spaces, I also observed differences in norms and habitus that would, I expect, present additional challenges to a potential collaboration between communities like these. What follows is by no means intended to be a comprehensive account of norms and culture in either community, nor do

these observations necessarily reflect all people or situations in each community. Rather, I selected these observations from my experiences in each community, as viewed from my own positionality, in order to demonstrate potential differences that could lead to cultural friction. To do so I present illustrative vignettes and descriptions of norms identified in each space. I attempt to illustrate what it *felt* like to be a part of these spaces.

Oregon

"Hi everyone, welcome, welcome! For those who are just joining, we asked everyone to put in the chat your name, pronouns, what city or town you're joining from, an emoji showing how you're feeling today, and your favorite thing about spring." A few stragglers were still popping up on the Zoom screen and a joyful buzz of conversation between a couple participants and one of the organizers filled the otherwise silence of my living room. The conversation was mostly in English with some occasional Spanish words mixed in. "We're going to start off with Yvette leading us in our land acknowledgement. Yvette, if you're ready we'll pass it off to you!"

This representative vignette of the opening of a typical OCEO or EJLI meeting is profuse with symbols and rituals that bear connection to broader norms and values of that space that are both cultural and political. Symbols are carriers of meaning, an important component of cultural analysis (Foster 1994). Rituals are practices performed in a particular culture that carry meaning. In groups, rituals like these have meaning as they represent the importance of these practices and associated broader cultural issues, to the group and its organizers.

The organizers of EJLI and the OCEO campaign went to great lengths to ensure everyone felt included and comfortable and could fully participate. This was, in part, to counter the technical nature or "wonkiness" of the process, discussed in greater detail in Chapter II. As a

response to the non-human and technical side of the work, organizers put extra effort into trying to make it engaging and relatable. The emoji check-in and introductory question demonstrated a valuation of participants as whole people, with many things going on in their lives. Even more significantly, an emphasis on inclusion helped to counter the historical (and ongoing) marginalization of groups based on language, gender or gender identity, race and ethnicity, etc.. For example, the group leaders request that participants state their pronouns in the chat to be inclusive of those who care to do so. This ritual supports and promotes the idea of openness to various gender constructions.

Another example of this kind of inclusive practice was the campaign's prioritization of linguistic inclusion, which was intended to counter the lack of ability to fully participate in political life because of language barriers. Organizers provided Spanish language translation at every session. During one session the priority placed on inclusion and enabling full participation for everyone was particularly evident. The Spanish language translation took place in a separate "channel" on the Zoom call, so at the beginning of the meeting participants would choose which channel to listen to – English or Spanish. The Spanish one featured the voice of an interpreter (one of the OCEO leaders) who was on the Zoom call interpreting in real-time. Most days, this required the interpreter to remind speakers at the beginning of the call or sometimes throughout to speak more slowly to ease interpretation. During this particular meeting, though, the organizers were having trouble getting the Spanish translation channel to work. It took about four or five attempts and about fifteen minutes of all participants waiting patiently before it ultimately worked.

Similarly, prioritizing a land acknowledgement at the beginning of every meeting, was an intentional act that signified "seeing" under-represented groups – Native Americans as well as

others – and was an act of resistance against a system that tends toward erasure of histories of oppression. This promoted recognition and procedural justice (McCauley & Heffron 2018) broadly, as well as more specific concerns about indigenous equity within the environmental justice space.

At one particular meeting, during the land acknowledgement, organizers asked us as participants to write in the chat box the name(s) of the tribe(s) whose land we ourselves now inhabited – and if we didn't know, to look it up on a map they provided. To energy justice advocates active in a local advocacy community, this is likely to be common knowledge – as they are likely to have gone through this process before, multiple times. However, at the time at which I was conducting my fieldwork I was not living amongst other activists. I was living in a relatively rural, relatively conservative community in central Oregon. At the time, I did not know whose ancestral lands I inhabited. When the question was posed, I experienced a mild panic. I knew of a tribal reservation fifty or so miles north of where I lived, and another tribe that lived a hundred miles or so south – but which one used to live here? Or both? I certainly did not want to come across as being ignorant of or not caring about this issue. I looked at the map. The boundaries of the territories for different groups of people weren't clear on the map, and I wasn't quite sure which territory overlapped with where I lived. I eventually decided to go with: "Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs" – which I typed into the chat box with some level of pride mixed with some level of anxiety that someone else who knew more than I did about Oregon's tribal ancestral territories, or indigenous issues more generally, would clarify that my guess was, in fact, wrong.

The concern I felt was not about being wrong as much as it was about being "outed" for my lack of knowledge of this issue, and my lack of "fit" with the group's values. The OCEO

group used these practices to indicate that certain values were important to that group, in that space. Specifically, the group wanted to demonstrate valuation of equity, inclusion, and respect for marginalized cultures. I did not want my lack of awareness of my own occupation of ancestral lands to be interpreted as a lack of these other values.

The rituals and associated values described here are associated with a habitus – a collection of knowledge and practices learned from living and interacting in a particular cultural environment. I will refer to this as an "energy justice habitus" – consistent with an eco-habitus (Kennedy & Givens 2019) but more focused on energy-related issues of justice and less specifically on environmental issues. This included a focus on inclusion across dimensions along which environmental justice communities have experienced marginalization, including race and indigeneity. Possession of an energy justice habitus allows for seamless functioning in an energy justice organization within which these rituals are practiced and valued. Conversely, my experience with the land acknowledgement exemplified how an imperfect mastery of an energy justice habitus can create discomfort in a cultural environment. These practices and rituals are embedded in the "group style" (Eliasoph & Lichterman 2003) and are part of the moral code. To embrace these practices was normative and expected, whereas to denounce, for example, the use of pronouns, or to refuse to participate in a land acknowledgement, in that space would have been unthinkable and frowned upon.

The values associated with these rituals have also become politicized in broader "culture wars" surrounding these progressive values. Conflicts surround the use of pronouns; there have been lawsuits, for example, about whether a teacher must refer to a student by the student's preferred pronouns. These exist alongside broader conflicts about gender inclusive bathrooms and numerous other conflicts surrounding gender identity and inclusion. Analogously, to counter

language equity efforts in the progressive community, there have been efforts on the political right to make English the "official language" of the United States and other attempts to suppress the ubiquity of Spanish (in large part due to racist and nationalist perspectives concerning the country's southern border). Countless other conflicts abound regarding equity and inclusion, a large component of what the political right often derogatorily terms so-called "wokeness".

Montana

During my time in Wilson I did not encounter the same kind of inclusion-oriented energy justice habitus I experienced in the OCEO campaign. In fact, no single habitus emerged from my dataset. Rather, my fieldwork observations revealed two themes. First, it appears that several components of the energy justice habitus observed in the OCEO campaign would find little cultural resonance in Wilson. Second, in Wilson I observed a series of instances in which my own cultural habitus conflicted with norms and values evident in the community. I entered this space as a community outsider, coming from a politically leftist state, and with an environmentalist and progressive perspective, and I expect other similarly positioned energy transition advocates who would enter spaces similar to Wilson might encounter similar areas of friction.

I provide two examples of the first theme listed above. First, I attended multiple public meetings, interacted with community members, and interviewed multiple people, and not once did I hear anyone state their pronouns. While there may be subcultures withing Wilson in which the use of gender pronouns is the norm, that was not the case among the general population with whom I interacted. Similarly, none of the public meetings I attended included a land acknowledgement. In addition to not being part of the progressive-left culture in which that is the

norm, a land acknowledgement in Wilson would actually have very particular meanings different from the more general recognition of indigenous history and sovereignty in the OCEO campaign.

Wilson is located about a half hour drive from a well-known tribe that was once removed from the land Wilson now occupies by the ancestors of some of the people currently residing in Wilson. The area was, in fact, the site of a famous battle in the history of settler colonization of the western United States, about which both tribal and settler communities still feel emotional scars. Some of these were conveyed to me by Jim's description of the historical trauma still faced by members of his community as a result of settler actions. While relations today are generally stable, there are still signs of underlying tensions. At one of the public meetings I attended, concerning the potential future development of a nuclear power plant in the community, Jim spoke about the impacts to the tribe's water supply of mine and power plant activity; later, Ray, the politician, told me privately that he believed the Tribe wasn't telling the truth about it. Another time, Jim, who knew I would be visiting different parts of the local area on my own, took me aside and gave me a warning. He told me what parts of the reservation were safe (at least for me) to go to and where to avoid. He did so because he knew I was not from the area and did not have this knowledge. With this kind of local awareness of historical and ongoing interactions and tensions between Tribal and settler communities, a land acknowledgement of the kind we engaged in during OCEO and EJLI meetings, part of an energy justice habitus, would seems out of place at best. It could seem nonsensical to many people in Wilson who are not aware of the ideological reasons for doing a land acknowledgement, because everyone there already knows the history of the land and its people.

Alongside these tensions I noticed between the OCEO campaign's energy justice habitus and cultural realities in Wilson, the second theme pertains to elements of my own habitus that I

sensed I would need to "check" or temper to successfully engage in interactions (and specifically, in my case, fieldwork) in this community. I consider this important because I expect that some energy justice transition advocates would encounter similar cultural conflicts if they engaged in collaboration with a similar community.

First, in Wilson, I decided I couldn't come across as too much of a liberal. This was a town that voted 75% Republican in the 2020 Presidential election (and 67% in the 2024 election). While I was there I was informed that it was part of the broader trend of areas experiencing decline in Democratic voting despite the local prominence of unions. I was already going to have other marks against me, too, being an outsider, someone going to school in Eugene, Oregon, and someone in an environmental sociology program studying coal mining.

The first item I considered was my clothing. Clothing communicates aspects of culture such as values, class status, and taste (Crane & Bovone 2006). Instead of my usual leggings and oversized colorful poncho sweater, which would seem completely unremarkable if seen in the halls of the sociology department of my academic institution in eccentric and progressive Eugene, Oregon, I opted instead, when I was getting ready for a day in the field in Wilson, for jeans, a nice-ish t-shirt, a baseball hat and worn leather work boots. Not too city, or academic-like, but, since everyone in that small community would likely know I wasn't from there, I didn't want to look like I was trying too hard to fit in, either. A social actor in Goffman's "Presentation of Self" (1956), I felt compelled to take care to intentionally present a "self" I felt would be well received.

I knew, too, that I was going to have to watch what I said – being honest but strategic about what I shared with whom, when, about my identity. I knew I should, when possible, keep the fact that I had come from Oregon to myself. "Yeah don't lead with that!" I was told by a staff

member at a local museum I stopped at, when I told her where I was from. This came up in my conversation with Ray, too. I mentioned to him, “That's one thing that I kind of, in my short time here, have picked up on, is that the community seems to be very friendly, like helping each other and people like me who are just random strangers.” Without missing a beat, Ray quipped, “Until you tell them you're from Oregon.” He continued, laughing, “You got to kind of watch that.” The fact that I was *originally* from New York was little reassurance.

Even though I knew this entering the field, when I first met Ray I was not quite prepared for the initial reception I received from him. He obviously ended up agreeing, ultimately, to interview with me, during which we had a very cordial and open conversation, as evidenced above. However, during our first encounter I had to both literally and figuratively stand my ground to break down the wall of mistrust he had for people like me. After the public meeting I attended at which the issue of Tanner’s responsibility for the community water supply was discussed, I saw Ray heading to leave, and I hurried over to him. I introduced myself and asked him if I could email him about trying to set up an interview with him and explained in a sentence or two what I was interested in speaking with him about.

I noticed that he was standing intimidatingly close to me. He was a bit taller than me. I had never been in any kind of physical altercation and was not used to feeling physically intimidated or needing to “act tough”. Instinctively, I guess, I knew I had to stand my ground. Eye to eye, he asked me, “Which side are you on?”, referring to coal. I knew this answer would be important, so I said carefully, “You know, I think that it’s okay to move away from fossil fuels but it needs to be done in a way that communities that have provided energy for all these years aren’t forgotten about.” He responded, “But the problem is, what you just said – moving away from coal.” He asked me where I was from. “Oregon – although I try not to tell people that

right away," I said to him. He gave me a look that indicated he was not happy about that answer. "We can talk," he said. "But you have to know my position. I'm a [decades-long] coal miner." I said, "Well, you know, I respect that. And I have family members that worked in the coal mines." We agreed to meet and parted ways. While I was able to navigate this barrier associated with my identity of being an academic, environmentally and progressively minded person from Oregon, it was not without some level of challenge and discomfort – and required me to choose my words and my approach carefully.

Meshing well with this culture, I was learning, required me to dress a certain way, watch what I said, and, as a final example, even eat certain things. Food is cultural (Stajcic 2013) and food preferences carry cultural meanings. Meat consumption is associated with various social demographic and structural characteristics (Gossard & York 2003), and among advocates of energy justice and just transition, vegetarianism is far from uncommon. It is in these spaces a normatively acceptable eating pattern valued and respected by many as a responsible choice in light of climate change and other environmental factors, animal welfare, and health concerns. In Wilson, Montana, however, I gained a very visceral reminder of the important cultural differences that can exist surrounding food.

When Andy, the rancher, agreed to interview with me he also invited me to join him and a group of students on a tour of his ranch. On the day of the tour I met up with him at his house and he drove me out to the spot where we were going to meet the student group. I had never been on such a large ranch, and after fifteen minutes we were still driving through his ranch and still not at our destination. I thought, this is a lot of land, and these are some lucky cows. After the tour we headed back to his home, and his wife, Amy, was in the middle of preparing a meal for them. When they generously asked me if I wanted to join I said yes, and shortly thereafter

learned that supper was going to be Salisbury steak – made, of course, from the beef they raised. Being a vegetarian for ten years, I hadn't had a hamburger in that long – and I had my reasons for that. Yet I had just spent the afternoon being graciously shown around by Andy, and he had explained to me some of the process of ranching – where the cattle go at different points of the year, how he manages the land to grow sufficient feed for the cattle, and how he and his family take care of them. This was clearly a rancher who took good care of his animals and his land. He took pride in it – but even more he viewed it as simply essential – if he was to preserve the land for his daughter and future generations. To not eat the beef that he raised would, I decided, not only be impolite to both him and Amy, but it would also potentially insult his livelihood, culture, and the efforts he takes to steward his cattle and land. To me, it was a no-brainer. Well, I guess I'm having beef for dinner, I thought to myself. I made sure to eat everything – not that it was hard because everything was delicious – including the beef.

This so-called "polite vegetarianism" worked for me, but it would not be so easy for more stringent vegetarians to navigate "surprise" omnivorous eating situations like this – or simply to readily find things to eat in the community, where vegetarian options were very limited. Culturally, too, differing ideas about what is morally acceptable and normal to eat could be challenging to navigate. It is difficult for some omnivores to understand vegetarianism, and it can be offensive to individuals in rural areas engaged in responsible ranching or farming when people consider their product morally reprehensible. Being the very kind people that they are, Andy and Amy would have, I am fairly certain, tried to accommodate my dietary preferences if I had told them. Yet would there have been a small part of them both that would have been hurt or offended? If a vegetarian energy transition activist from Oregon were to work with ranchers from Wilson, MT, their dietary differences would certainly not be an insurmountable barrier.

However, it does represent an additional hurdle, widening a bit further the cultural divide they must try to navigate.

Cross-Cultural Comparison

In these two communities I observed cultural differences in norms, habitus and values that could, I would expect, create some tension if they were to, hypothetically speaking, interact. In the OCEO community I experienced what I refer to as an energy justice habitus that focused on justice and inclusion for historically marginalized communities including those demarcated by gender and gender identity, language (and, indirectly, race/ethnicity), and indigeneity.

I did not identify this kind of unified habitus during my fieldwork in Wilson. However, I encountered particular norms and expectations and had to adjust my own norms and behavior accordingly to facilitate smoother interactions in an environment in which my norms were not the norm. This included adjusting my dress, uncharacteristically needing to stand my ground in an intimidating situation, and passing as an omnivore. Given my positionality in comparison with the general composition of the energy transition movement space, I would anticipate some other members of that space could encounter similar experiences if and when they ventured into a community like Wilson.

Discussion and Conclusions

During my experiences and conversations with the activist community comprising the OCEO campaign in Oregon and the community of Wilson, Montana, I observed important differences in cultural norms and habitus and the frames people used to make sense of their relationships with energy capital. While OCEO participants demonstrated what I refer to as an

energy justice habitus, a cohesive habitus was not evident in Wilson. I did encounter, however, norms and values there that I have suggested would likely create cultural friction with an energy justice habitus. The OCEO campaign framed the conflict they faced in terms of just transition. In Wilson, multiple nascent frames focused on the continued viability of the community and assigned blame in varying degrees to the local coal industry and out-of-state environmentalists.

In the OCEO campaign, the fact that advocacy included but was not limited to workers aligned it, in one sense, with a more comprehensive framing of just transition. However, I argue that the frame was also limited – but not in the way that some scholars of just transition have used the term, referring to focusing narrowly on the concerns of fossil fuel workers (Galgoczi 2020). Here the limitation pertained to the scope of inclusion along the two axes mentioned earlier: 1) position along the fossil fuel commodity chain and 2) position within (or outside) the energy transition movement space. Evaluating the scope of an energy justice frame along these two axes has not, to my knowledge, been explicitly explored in the literature. The focus of the first axis centers the material nature of the fossil fuel system and considers how energy transition movement organizations deal with the diversity of issues that can arise "upstream" and "downstream" along the fossil fuel commodity chain. The second axis evaluates the permeability of cultural boundaries that demarcate the social movement space.

Social movement frames can be thought of as functioning like actual picture frames, where the frame determines what is in the picture and what is outside of it (Snow, Vliegenthart & Ketelaars 2019: 393). The OCEO picture frame appeared to be centered primarily on "downstream" communities. While OCEO's conflict with the utility companies in fact concerned both "downstream" consumption-level issues like energy cost to consumers, as well as "upstream" issues like energy source, the comprehensive framing of just transition did not appear

to extend to upstream, provisioning communities. Rather, OCEO appeared to take a socio-technical approach, focusing narrowly on carbon emissions – not justice issues – regarding upstream issues. Meanwhile, the campaign took a holistic justice-oriented approach toward the issues located closer to them in the commodity chain, like labor provisions for renewable energy workers. So, while the OCEO advocated for a people-centered approach focused on communities, or, as it was often said, "community" in the singular, ironically, communities upstream were not generally included in this advocacy. Likewise, in Wilson, the scope of the framing was limited by location on the fossil fuel commodity chain – but framings in there instead focused only on issues related to their local ("upstream") community.

The picture frame also had a second limitation, which has attracted little research in the context of the energy transition movement – position within or outside a social movement space or field. In the OCEO campaign the frame used was likely to be resonant primarily with people already in the movement, in part because of some of the concepts and terminology that was used. Since the campaign was embedded in a social movement space, it explicitly used a social movement frame and associated language. In Wilson, people's stories and beliefs had not been crystallized into a particular social movement frame. So, in Montana participants didn't consider themselves part of a "frontline community", they were just part of a community.

Similarly, the goal of "stopping the bad, building the new" would likely not resonate in Wilson. People in fossil fuel dependent communities don't always see fossil fuels as simply "bad" – even when they have nuanced understanding of them and see many risks and detrimental impacts. They may also consider fossil fuels to be important to their community's culture and heritage. Alternatively, they may see the solution to fossil fuels' negative impacts as more complex than shutting down the mines and plants. In fact, in Wilson, the most significant

environmental “bad” that community members in Wilson saw that they would want to stop – the ash ponds – could potentially worsen with additional shutdowns at the power plant and associated sudden exiting of the companies from the area. Additionally, extractive communities might not see “the new” as good due to past traumas of extraction and lack of trust in companies as well as government. In Wilson, there were no concrete plans to “build” anything “new” there – in fact, the battle for them was to gain access to use the infrastructure they already had - for example, the hostage power lines. Efforts to crystallize from the nascent frames in Wilson a more unified frame that would align with that of the OCEO campaign would require frame resonance, which would require the social movement frame to be compatible with at least of some beliefs and framings currently held in Wilson.

Similarly, while the energy justice habitus in the OCEO campaign made a comfortable space for people already possessing that habitus – already involved in social movement activity – it would likely be difficult for someone outside the space to readily join. Energy transition organizations seeking to build connections across ideologically diverse communities will likely encounter cultural norms that may be in tension with each other between an organization and a community with which it seeks to collaborate. Such organizations could benefit from preparing to readily work with people with different habitus, and to whom their own habitus might be challenging to navigate. Energy transition organizations, and the communities with which they work, could benefit from expanding the repertoire of tools in their cultural toolkit (Swidler 1986). A particular possibility that emerged from these findings could involve shifting from a formal “land acknowledgement” in a place like Wilson to talking to residents about the area’s history of settler-indigenous relations and, perhaps, speaking with people in the Tribal

community about their perspectives. Another possibility might entail careful consideration of presentations of self, including clothing choices and introductions of one's place of origin.

These challenges and opportunities, for bridging cultural differences, considered alongside structural similarities in each community's relative position vis-à-vis energy capital, can together help illuminate a starting point for the formation of a limited collective identity. Scholars have noticed that identification of a common master frame (Caroll & Ratner 1996) or similar obstacles (bell Hooks 1986; Greenberg & Mollick 2017; Shelby 2002) can lead to mutual support or solidarity. Collective identity formation can be fostered through identification of a common struggle, a common structural position or identity within a conflict. If different entities can recognize the similarities in their struggles, they may find ways to collaborate, unify, or learn from each other, strengthening their collective position vis-à-vis energy capital.

In terms of structural similarities between the OCEO campaign community and the community in Wilson, my findings indicate that both communities experience a dependence on energy capital. In the OCEO community members were dependent on the utility companies for power. Most were renters and had to use the power source that accompanied their rental unit. While community owned energy projects could help wean energy justice communities off of IOU-controlled power and thus foster community resilience, these were not readily available, and the IOUs actively tried to suppress their emergence. Community members in Wilson were dependent on the power plant company for work and for various amenities it had provided to Wilson in the past. Both communities felt compelled to work with energy capital, particularly as capital entities worked to arrange things so that that doing so seemed like a community's only or best option. Capital is adept at providing just enough benefit to communities that it is not worth the cost for the community to fight. Additionally these communities also had in common

exposure to environmental, health and economic impacts, even while these looked and manifested differently in each space.

For these reasons, both communities can be described as participants in an exploitative and extractivist capitalist economy – and this common situation within the energy system could comprise the foundation of a unifying frame. Such a frame opens the opportunity to see struggles in places like Wilson and in the OCEO community as both environmental and economic struggles – to identify the full range of resources – human, financial, environmental and health – that have been taken from both kinds of communities in the extractivist relationship. It invites the expansion of the frame in the OCEO campaign along both axes mentioned above. Frame alignment in these communities might entail several frame alignment processes. The comprehensive nature of the OCEO frame could undergo frame extension (Snow et al 1986) to be inclusive of communities like Wilson. In Wilson, the corporate responsibility nascent frame could be amplified, wherein particular values or beliefs are emphasized by a social movement organization (Snow et al 1986). Meanwhile, the nascent frame that places blame on out-of-state environmentalists could be the target of frame transformation (Snow et al 1986) efforts on the part of energy transition advocates.

The newly emerged broader frame would not, inherently, rule out communities working with energy capital (although a true ecological Marxist interpretation would do so). However, the value of working in collaboration with energy capital could be evaluated not according to whether doing so would benefit a singular community, but rather whether it would be in the interest of a solidaristic community class within the extractivist energy system. By "community class" I refer to communities across the country connected in a solidaristic network. This does

not imply that all need to work together but all can work in solidarity with and with awareness of each other's struggles as part of the community class.

Class consciousness can be considered a particular kind of collective identity. Lukacs (1923:59) defines class consciousness as "appropriate and rational reactions 'imputed'…to a particular typical position in the process of production." Following Barca (2015) and others who have called for an ecological class consciousness, my findings call for what might be termed a "community class consciousness" – a class of communities similarly placed, structurally, in an extractive relationship with capital. The notion of "community" is salient in both the OCEO community and in Wilson; participants in both places used the term again and again. In some instances, to help create a collective identity, social movement organizers may draw upon another, independent collective identity (Polletta & Jasper 2001: 291), which, here, I suggest could be an identification with the community of Wilson or the frontline communities that were the center of the OCEO campaign.

The concept of a "community class consciousness" could draw criticism for not providing a structural basis for class formation, as is provided by the capital-labor relation within the production process. As Lukacs (1923) argues, "Bourgeoisie and proletariat are the only pure classes in bourgeois society. They are the only classes whose existence and development are entirely dependent on the course taken by the modern evolution of production…" He claims that the position of other classes (he was referring to the petty bourgeoisie or peasants) was related not just to their position in the process of production but to the symptoms rather than the structure of society. And to be sure, there are material differences between the community-capital relations in the two communities in my data. For example, while the OCEO participant in Oregon said, "They work for us", a power plant worker in Wilson could easily say, "We work

for them." Whereas the OCEO campaign was fighting to gain something new, something they didn't have, community members in Wilson were engaged in a struggle to hold on to something they might lose. However, despite these variations, more fundamentally, a community's situation in an extractive relationship with capital is indeed itself a structural position. Much like capital extracts surplus value from labor, and from the environment (Foster 2000), so too does it from communities. A solidarity perspective and the goal of a community class consciousness undermines uncritical fealty to energy capital and fosters opportunity for the development and strengthening of relationships across the community class.

Indeed, the people in Wilson sought viable and trustworthy relationships they could count on – relationships that were economic, but also emotional. Ray, the politician, talked about the community's relationship with "people in Oregon and Washington" as if the latter had betrayed Wilson. Wilson wanted its gift of reliable energy (Smith 2019) reciprocated. And when I suggested activists in those states are familiar with exploitative relationships with capital, such as Wilson was experiencing, Ray said with dismay, "They don't understand," a lament that could have just as easily been expressed of people with whom he actually had a real relationship. Likewise, workers at the power plant in Wilson wanted to have a sustainable employment relationship with a company that would not just pack up and leave at a moment's notice. OCEO community members also sought not only reliable electricity they could afford, but a resilient energy system that was led by community power. They wanted to be heard and respected by the utility provider – relational attributes that go beyond simple economic relations. People and communities are embedded in relationships; meanwhile, capital has no concern for communities and no connections with people. The people of Wilson and in OCEO knew this – that capital is not to be trusted.

Two features of capitalism contribute to undermining the kinds of relationships sought in the two communities. The first feature is capital's transience and mobility. According to Paul Sweezy, the capitalist system "is one that never stands still, one that is forever changing, adopting new and discarding old methods of production and distribution, opening up new territories, subjecting to its purposes societies too weak to protect themselves" (Foster, Clark & York 2010:76). Capital is loyal to no one and nowhere – it can pick up its roots in one place and just as quickly throw them down in another place – if it is deemed in the best interest of its bottom line and its shareholders. Capitalism operates by "subsuming all natural and social relationships to the drive to accumulate capital" (Foster, Clark & York 2010:75). It can abruptly close a power plant or shut down a generating unit at a facility and abscond responsibility for the environmental, health and economic impacts it caused, perhaps declaring bankruptcy and changing its name to skirt the law. Likewise, it can show up in a new community all but unannounced to wreak devastation there.

Not only did energy capital not provide trustworthy, reliable relationships between itself and the OCEO and Wilson communities, it also influenced the nature of relations between the two communities. In an energy system controlled by capital, relationships between communities in the system always have capital as an intermediary. Much like the rift between town and country in Marx's theorizing, energy capital creates a rift between energy producing and energy consuming communities. Relationships between these communities, under capitalism, are commodified relationships defined by exchange-values rather than solidaristic ones defined by use-values. Smith (2009) identified a similar pattern in her work in a Powder River Basin coal mining community. Moreover, these relations are fragile and easily broken at the whim of capital. Marx's conceptualization of alienation included alienation between people (Petrovic

1963). He theorized that interpersonal alienation arises from alienation within the labor process. It appears that a parallel alienation between communities could be guiding the interaction between communities like those in the OCEO campaign and in Wilson.

Where people in a community like Wilson want to feel appreciated, with their efforts reciprocated with care and concern, they actually experience a mere economic exchange. Instead of a gift from a community of hard-working people in Wilson, MT, people in Oregon see polluting energy that costs too much. Why would an energy transition movement organization in Oregon have empathy for an energy-provisioning community whose face is merely a commodity – particularly when that commodity is the coal that pollutes their communities? They vote to switch fossil fuel sources, not to switch communities that they solidaristically support by purchasing their product – because they don't see them. For their part, people in Wilson see communities in Oregon and Washington merely as buyers, rather than living communities that need to be able to breathe clean air and drink clean water too.

Since these communities do not communicate except through the intermediary of the energy system, there is little means for these messages and priorities, important to each community, to be conveyed. This is particularly true when energy capital is actively trying to portray those communities in a different and less favorable light. Yet the discontent forged in each community as a result of the destruction of these relationships could contribute to capitalism's self-destruction in a dialectical Marxist interpretation. The development of a solidaristic community class consciousness, enabled by frame alignment in combination with strategies to reduce cross-cultural friction, could enable the communities to communicate with and "see" each other directly, not through the intermediary of capital.

The communities of OCEO and Wilson, and communities like them, are materially bound by power lines, the steady stream of electrons running through them, and the social and economic structure built up around them. But, situated as they are currently with energy capital mediating their relations, they have difficulty seeing each other and the similarities in the situations they occupy relative to it. They are both subject to the power of energy capital in influencing the frames they use to interpret their relationship with the latter, and their relationship (or not) with each other. The realization of this arrangement, however, provides agency to communities – both those currently involved in the energy transition movement and those on its periphery – to find unlikely allies in their common struggle. It also has the possibility of strengthening the energy transition movement if it allows for a broader base of support and, potentially greater legitimacy for the movement.

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Chapter V

Conclusion

We began this foray into the energy transition movement space in the context of a broader motivating question. How can the energy transition movement contribute to the mutual resolution of the dual crises of ecology and civil society, helping to draw us, as a society, back away from these precipices, rather than sending us plummeting off the edge? One approach to such a task, I have suggested, lies in the process of bridge-building. Yet in the energy transition movement space, spanning as it does both geographical and cultural divides, bridge-building is particularly challenging. This investigation centered on the following two overarching research questions:

1) **How do energy transition movement organizations navigate bridge-building?** Specifically, what strategies are most successful and what challenges do they face? What influences their decisions about when to engage in bridge-building and with whom?
2) **How can bridge-building across the energy system's vast social and geographic divides be made more feasible?** How can social theory inform such a task?

Using data collected through qualitative interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, I attempted to address these questions through three separate but related empirical investigations in Chapters II through IV.

In the remainder of this chapter I first identify some methodological limitations of this project and recommendations for future research designs. Next, I summarize the theoretical contributions put forth in each of the preceding three chapters as well as the overall contributions of this dissertation as a whole. I address practical implications of some key findings that emerged

from this work and suggest pathways forward for both the energy transition movement itself, and scholars seeking to conduct research that furthers its mission.

Methodological Limitations

While this project generated some valuable insights and contributions, it was also subject to important methodological limitations. First, the sample of ET organizations whose staff members I interviewed provided a wide range of organizational types, foci and locations. This was helpful for understanding the breadth of challenges and opportunities these organizations face in terms of bridge-building, but it also limited my ability to make direct comparisons between the organizations along these different variables. Future research designs that control for variables such as organizational type or location would provide such insight, as would comparative case studies between particular organizations of interest.

My analysis in Chapter III would have benefited from more direct and rigorous measures of both social distance and geographic distance. I evaluated these measures qualitatively from my overall assessment of relations between an ET organization and the individuals or organizations with which it was engaging in bridging activities. A more rigorous method of assessing these measures would also likely require follow-up interviews with participants to ask more in-depth questions about the particular bridging activities at hand. Yet such a method might also allow for quantitative testing of the chapter's findings.

My ethnographic fieldwork also presented limitations. First, it would be informative to conduct additional and more extended site visits in Wilson to further explore the unifying principles underlying the nascent frames I identified there. Even more importantly, an extended investigation could provide an opportunity to test the frame resonance of different elements of

the community class consciousness frame I proposed in Chapter IV. More broadly, the communities I focused on in that chapter serve as a starting point for this kind of assessment of how cultural differences can obscure identification of a common structural position. Especially needed are more detailed investigations of habitus, and how habitus impacts social movement activities and success – not just in transnational spaces but here between groups in the United States. This work could include an investigation of whether the concept of an energy justice habitus is relevant in other ET organizations.

Theoretical Contributions and Recommendations for Action and Research

The analysis in Chapter II centered on the ways in which two social movement activities – here, involvement in the policy process and bridge-building – can come into conflict with one another. Theoretically, this investigation highlighted the importance of considering unintended consequences of regular social movement activities. In this case, such an unintended consequence might be inhibition of bridge-building capacities due to participation in the policymaking process. Pertaining to bridge-building specifically, findings from this chapter revealed the importance of seeking nuance, grounding bridge-building efforts in people's own experiences, and focusing on specific instances of a more abstract issue, in order to avoid triggering polarizing ideologies. It also revealed a mechanism that may operate in other social movement campaigns in which organizers intentionally avoid legitimizing ideas similar to those of their opponents – thus further polarizing issue debates. Insights from Chapter II also suggest the potential utility of making changes to the policy process itself.

Chapter III was motivated by the observation that many bridge-building best practices are most easily or readily accomplished through locally-based bridging. Yet in the energy transition,

many stakeholder communities are located distant from areas with the greatest density of ET organizations. I described this tension in terms of a dialectical relationship to frame the analysis. In the chapter I sought patterns in organizational bridge-building across social and geographical distance. Most organizations engaged in bridge-building across one dimension but not both, leaving a void in bridge-building between ET organizations and communities located both socially and geographically distant from them. The emergent dialectical tension cautions against over-reliance on local connections that could result in communities operating in accordance with a "place for itself" mentality. From a network perspective, an over-reliance on weak ties that are between homophilous nodes can serve to segregate a social movement (Yuan & Gay 2006: 1067). Findings from the chapter also indicated, however, that some organizations, due in part to their place-based experiences over time, were well positioned to engage in two-dimensional bridging in the ET movement, filling the void, and shifting the terms of the dialectic to reduce the tension.

In Chapter IV I juxtaposed two communities very differently placed along the fossil fuel commodity chain and in their position within or outside the energy transition movement space, and I engaged in ethnographic fieldwork in both communities. Methodologically, multi-sited ethnography in such differently positioned communities in the ET is rare, and it presented me an opportunity to observe possible obstacles and opportunities for bridge-building between communities like the ones I observed, that would likely go unnoticed in single-site ethnographies. This approach also allowed me to experience tensions between my habitus and the cultural norms present in each community, identifying ways in which an energy justice cultural toolkit could be expanded to successfully engage in bridge-building with more diverse communities. Examining the frames used in the OCEO campaign revealed limitations that omit

communities positioned similarly to Wilson – an observation that is relevant to many just transition organizations, not just the OCEO campaign. I argued that expansion of the frame "upstream" along the fossil fuel commodity chain and outward from the energy transition movement space could create opportunity for frame alignment and the development of a solidaristic community class consciousness.

Taken as a whole, this dissertation addresses what I believe to be important gaps in the literature and practice concerning bridge-building and the energy transition movement. In linking the dual crises with which I opened this dissertation, I assert their inextricable nature. I take the perspective the bridge-building is an important social movement activity, not only to improve the movement's acceptance, legitimacy, or access to resources (Gawerc 2020) but to contribute to avoiding the crisis of civil society.

A corollary to this perspective is the implication that it is possible for social movements to, alternatively, have (unintended) anti-social consequences if they contribute to greater polarization – either ideological or affective. Scholars have identified that the development of coalitions with some organizations can alienate others (Zajak & Haunss 2021). Similarly, dense networks rich in bonding ties between actors with high degrees of homophily (Yuan & Gay 2006: 1067) or place-based solidarities (Nicholls 2009: 80) can leave other parts of a network poorly connected. While my research does not make quantitative claims about these matters, it demonstrates ways in which these patterns might operate in movement organizations and communities. Further research is warranted to investigate how social movements can achieve their stated goals while avoiding polarization of their target issues or populations.

This dissertation, then, engaged in a critical analysis of the energy transition movement. I turned the analytical lens toward the ET movement itself to identify ways in which movement

activities or decisions could result in more polarizing outcomes and, importantly, to identify ways in which these tendencies could be shifted. While the extent of unintentional polarizing discourse or actions that come from the ET movement pale in comparison to the intentional polarizing rhetoric and actions of capital, the ET movement has a greater interest in avoidance of the ecological and civil society crises. So, I make suggestions about how the ET movement might more successfully engage in or center bridge-building not because the ET movement is more to blame for societal divisions than capital, but because it is the entity more likely to make positive change. I next consider specific recommendations for future action and research that emerged from a holistic assessment of the conclusions developed in the preceding chapters.

Expanding the Just Transition Frame and Research Agenda

Chapter IV identified limitations in the framing of just transition that was used by the OCEO campaign. Specifically, the framing was limited along two axes: position along the fossil fuel commodity chain and position within or outside of the energy transition movement space. I argued that the OCEO campaign used an inclusive, comprehensive and transformative just transition frame to address issues and communities that were near to it in terms of both fossil fuel commodity chain position and position in ET movement space; meanwhile, it used a more limited conception of energy transition in alignment with a socio-technical transition framing, to address issues for communities more distant along these axes.

This fossil fuel commodity chain myopia appears to be present in research on just transition frames. Just transition scholars have noted a concentration of both policies and research concerning fossil fuel dependent communities, or those upstream in the commodity chain (Mertins-Kirkwood 2018), an observation that prompted increased research interest in just

transition efforts in historically marginalized environmental justice communities, which are often "downstream" on the commodity chain. Findings from the preceding chapters suggest that helpful insights and opportunities for possible frame alignment can be garnered from considering communities at different points on the commodity chain in the same research study and comparing their structural and cultural circumstances.

For researchers, this suggests the importance of evaluating just transition frames as well as just transition policies, with these axes of difference in mind, to ensure comprehensive inclusion of differently positioned communities. To my knowledge, these axes have not previously been identified as important to consider in just transition theory development or policy circles. It would also be important to evaluate patterns in organizational use of different just transition frames across the entire social movement space. A network analysis of organizational frames that attends to geographical location would greatly advance this understanding.

Claiming the Policy Process

In Chapter II I observed that the policy process itself or, more precisely, some of its characteristics including its timetable and its technical and often binary nature, can act as an obstacle to bridge-building efforts. I suggested modifying the policy process in terms of these characteristics. In light of the findings from other chapters, it may be worth considering how the policy process can be modified to accommodate communities located at multiple positions in the fossil fuel commodity chain and energy transition movement space, and at greater geographical and social distances. Considering these possibilities confronts us with questions of scale of

governance. Energy systems span scales vertically and horizontally (Goldthau & Sovacool 2012); yet often policies are made at the state level that impact communities in other states.

Yet it may be that social movement efforts can work around these institutional roadblocks. For example, given relative inaction on climate change at the international level, transnational organizations implemented global change in multiple local sites in accordance with nodal governance theory (Kauffman 2016). In doing so they creatively worked around the obstacle of inaction by taking matters into their own hands. Perhaps we can envision a way in which bridge-building is seen by social movement organizations as *part of* participation in the policy process, wherein they take it upon themselves to implement bridge-building in their own processes of engagement with the political process.

For example, practicing intentional inclusivity (Coley, Raynes & Das 2020), ET organizations involved in the policy process could deliberately seek out individuals from communities "upstream" or "downstream" in the fossil fuel commodity chain that would be impacted by the policy proposal at hand. Once they had established a working relationship, the ET organization could invite these individuals to accompany the ET organization to the next local public utility regulatory meetings or legislative hearings it was planning to attend. This would require an investment on the part of the ET organization, but demonstrating support from impacted communities could provide greater legitimacy to their position in the policy sphere. The ongoing scholarly and applied work that would be needed to refine such an approach could be facilitated by collaborative efforts between critical sociologists and political scientists, as well as practitioners from policymaking and social movement lines of work.

Connected Localism: Networks of Local Bridge-Building

Throughout this dissertation the importance of the "local" emerged from both data and analysis, namely, in the ways working locally can support some aspects of bridge-building and also limit the communities with which bridging occurs. Networks of local activism may provide a path toward achieving the benefits of working locally while also accommodating the breadth and diversity of the ET movement. This kind of "connective action" (Bennett and Segerberg 2013) can be contrasted with, and is an increasingly important complement to, conventional place-based collective action.

In this kind of network, community-based ET organizations can function as network nodes, and they have all the advantages that accompany local bridging work, such as the ability to draw on place frames (Martin 2003), or the ability to focus on specific, concrete local occurrences of a broader societal problem to avoid activating polarizing ideologies, a strategy identified in Chapter II. They can benefit from repeated place-based interactions with community members to have greater capacity to bridge across social differences (Gawerc 2021; Nicholls 2009). Local bridge-builders who have lived experience in a community may share perspectives about local energy companies or energy-related issues, as did the two-dimensional bridge-builders I observed in Chapter III. Barring that, they may at least be familiar with their community members' perspectives on these issues and have a shared language or symbolic repertoire to draw from to discuss these issues with others in their community in a non-alienating way.

The development of a network of these kinds of locally-based bridging nodes would help to prevent local bridge-building efforts from succumbing to a logic of "place for itself" and developing ultra-dense network ties in one segment of the network while foregoing relations

with more distant nodes. This kind of interconnection could also allow the ET movement to benefit from leveraging the multi-scalar nature of the network to engage in "scale-shift" (Routledge 2013), moving resources from one scale to another. For instance, this practice could help the ET movement overcome resource challenges that have typically accompanied efforts to build bridges across geographic space (Nicholls 2009). Larger and more well-resourced organizations in a network, or resources held collectively at network-scale, could be shifted across the network and provided to smaller locally-based organizations that engage in types of bridge-building that larger organizations may not be suited for.

Through this arrangement ET organizations located in distant communities in the network would help foster real community-to-community relationships. These relationships could help overcome the distortions to relationships between potential social movement allies, so often promoted by capital, such as we saw between the communities in Wilson and the OCEO campaign in Chapter IV. Therefore, this kind of network could also facilitate the development of a community class consciousness.

A network of locally-based organizations is also an idea that could appeal to individuals across the political spectrum. The concept of localism is often avoided in progressive circles and in progressive social theory because of its associations with politically far-right ethnic and other forms of nationalism, "small government" and devolution of power and deregulation, and the "place for itself" mentality. Indeed, it does have conceptual linkages to ideas about self-sufficiency and local sovereignty, which are often associated with the political right. However, a networked localism avoids the problems of pure localism because of its interconnected and collectivist nature, and it aligns well with governance arrangements of an ecological democracy:

"popularly elected local, regional and multiregional councils" that are networked globally (Magdoff & Williams 2017).

How might such a network of local bridging efforts be created? Due to time and resource constraints faced by most social movement organizations, such a network should have low barriers to entry and accommodate participation from organizations located far from each other. Virtual networking opportunities offer promise in creating this environment. Prior to the ubiquity of Zoom and other virtual platforms, geographical bridging was limited to well resourced "mobile activists" (Nicholls 2009). A hybrid virtual network of locally-based bridging efforts can allow for broader and more comprehensive involvement in bridge-building efforts.

A Critical Moment for Bridge-Building

We arrive at these conclusions at a critical moment. On November 5th, 2024, a plurality of Americans who voted cast their vote for President for Donald Trump, a fact that is cause for pause, and for consideration of not only what that might indicate about how close the United States is to an authoritarian regime, but also what it says about our society and its conflicts.

Scholars have outlined parallels between the rise of Trump and Trumpism and the rise of Hitler and fascism, including the appeal to economically marginalized segments of the population with racist and nationalist rhetoric, and the "bringing into line" of various arms and functions of the state (Foster 2017). The authoritarian label appeared to become alarmingly appropriate on January 6, 2021, when supporters of the former President violently invaded and rioted in the United States Capitol, with the aim of disrupting the certification of the results of the election that Trump lost. While there remain debates and, at least for the time being, criminal cases surrounding the question of Trump's instigation of the event, what is not debated is that he

did not immediately and blatantly denounce the invasion. Accusations of Trump's authoritarian tendencies became more commonly and openly discussed in the months leading up to the 2024 election when he said he would "only" act like a dictator on Day One of his presidency, that he had developed a "hit-list" of his political opponents to fire upon his ascendancy to power and whom he would then replace with loyalists; and that he would use United States military personnel domestically against the U.S. population. Clearly, we are witnessing a regime with at least some authoritarian tendencies.

After Trump was elected in 2016, scholarly speculation abounded surrounding the cause of his election. Many attributed his election to segments of the electorate that felt forgotten, unrecognized, abandoned, or not well represented by the political left – for varying combinations of economic and cultural reasons (Berlet & Sunshine 2019; Edelman 2021; Montenegro de Wit et al 2021). Following the election of 2024, we can anticipate additional speculation to be emerging in short order.

Regardless of how the theory dust settles, however, one fact remains clear: the country is in the midst of a severe cultural and political divide. We have observed that ecological destruction and political polarization are mutually interdependent. Accumulation and exploitation under capital together are the root cause of the ecological crisis; meanwhile, capital manufactures political and cultural divides and exploits those that already exist, exacerbating the crisis of civil society. In the energy transition, the result is not only slowed progress, but the "progress" that is achieved is that which has capital's stamp of approval. This means implementation of large-scale, capital-intensive renewable energy projects, sited where there is least resistance, often in environmental justice communities, or those that have experienced exploitation at the hands of energy capital in the past. It can also mean that ET organizations

choose to ally with capital to accomplish reformist energy transition objectives, leaving out more comprehensive social justice concerns of some segments of the working class.

If we seek to avoid descent into authoritarianism, now is not the time to stick to siloed and spatially limited just transition frames, entrench exclusionary localist ties, and battle it out in a zero-sum policy arena. Rather, it is a time to seek nuanced understanding of the experiences of socially and geographically distant others, to seek common frames and develop networks of connected communities. It is a time to engage in bridge-building. Such work within the energy transition movement is a starting point and, in my view, a necessary one, if we want to address imminent ecological crises in the current political environment. However, bridge-building across all sectors of society appears increasingly important in the name of justice, equity and the preservation of democracy.

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