

## **Nichole Dusyk: The transformative potential of participatory politics: Energy planning and emergent sustainability in British Columbia, Canada.**

This research examines the potential for local engagement in British Columbia's energy planning regime and the contribution it might make to a low-carbon energy transition. Combining a social worlds framework with the concept of hybrid forums, I develop the thesis that participation can facilitate sociotechnical change by creating opportunities to collectively reframe problems and their solutions, and to explore new identities. This is what I call the transformative potential of participatory politics.

I explore and elaborate this thesis via a discourse analysis of British Columbia's clean energy policy agenda and two case studies of communities in British Columbia: Fort St. John and Dawson Creek. The discourse analysis examines the evolution of the provincial clean energy storyline, introduced in 2007, and how it serves to position actors and technologies in the province. The analysis shows how the storyline, although integrating an environmental imperative into policy discourse, reproduces the trajectory and inertia of historical energy development.

The case study analysis examines municipal energy planning and one large-scale renewable energy project in each of the two case study communities. In Fort St. John, I examine a 900 MW hydroelectric project and in Dawson Creek, a 102 MW wind park. My analysis describes the mechanisms and sites of collective negotiation and how in each case, participatory processes have substantively altered technologies, collective identities, and the framing of energy planning. Taken together, the case studies support the thesis that participatory politics can contribute to energy transitions by altering the social and material characteristics of energy networks. In so doing, they add nuance to our understanding of what participatory energy governance 'does' and the circumstances in which it is effective. This includes findings that highlight the significance of the institutional, political, and infrastructural context in which participatory governance unfolds leading to the conclusion that participation, although potentially transformative, is not a panacea.

In conclusion, I situate my findings in relation to the concept of procedural sustainability arguing that by making room for collective negotiation, participatory politics can help move beyond the apparent antagonism of implementing renewable energy projects toward a more productive approach of localizing energy projects and collectively constructing sustainability discourses and practices.