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# Emerging Climate Change Publics: Cultivating Sustainability and Justice in the Pioneer Valley

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EMERGING CLIMATE CHANGE PUBLICS:
CULTIVATING SUSTAINABILITY AND JUSTICE IN THE PIONEER VALLEY


A Dissertation Presented

by

VANESSA ADEL


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Emerging Green Publics:
Cultivating Sustainability and Justice in the Pioneer Valley


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## DEDICATION

To my children. For a better future.

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over the years asserting my value and my participation as an academic member of the student body. I hope you know how much you enabled me to keep my eyes on the prize and assert my place in academia despite some major life challenges.

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**ABSTRACT**

EMERGING CLIMATE CHANGE PUBLICS:

CULTIVATING SUSTAINABILITY AND JUSTICE IN THE PIONEER VALLEY

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Climate change is setting off erratic weather patterns and environmental changes that threaten the livelihood, stability, and survival of the planet. Communities and institutions around the globe are sounding the clarion call about these devastating impacts, advocating for sustainable practices and deep changes to every facet of our lives.

This dissertation research consists of an ethnography of a local network of actors and organizations who are responding to climate change, centered on those who define sustainability as integrally connected to justice. I analyze this network of activity through the lens of the concept of an emerging public.

I start from the premise that publics are sites that facilitate the potential for collective agency. Publics have the potential to make a wedge between the imperatives that drive the market and the state -- imperatives that are driven by power interests that are largely

driving the unsustainable practices that have engendered climate change in the first place.

At many points, the research revealed a tenacious gap between an inspired vision of sustainability and justice, and real-life points of entry through which to enact that vision. Participants often felt frustrated that they weren't doing more; that action steps seemed far from the discussions at hand. The data revealed a kind of public incapacity that needed explaining.

To this end, I identify three areas that were fundamental to creating openings for agency in emerging publics: discourse, knowledge production, and the structure of publics.

I argue that the agentic potential of emerging climate change publics to produce social changes that benefit all citizens is constrained by three tensions observed in this data: 1. the tension between the discursive threads of justice on the one hand, and sustainability on the other 2. the tension between expert and experiential knowledge, and 3. the tension between a desire for inclusive publics, and the reality of their stratification.

In conclusion, I argue that if we can see these tensions more clearly, we can work to make publics more effective as sites for unleashing the collective imagination, as well as for generating change that is socially just.

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# CHAPTER 1
# EMERGING CLIMATE CHANGE PUBLICS:
# CONTEXTUALIZING THE RESEARCH

## Climate Change: Shaping Global Narratives of Crisis, Opportunity, and Justice

> "The climate crisis is an all-enveloping crisis: every social formation, and every dimension of social life, is profoundly affected. It is indeed the archetypal crisis of survival. At the same time, climate crisis has a defined origin and a discrete and largely predictable trajectory. Thus the scope of climate justice is apocalyptic, in terms of lifting the veil on an unfolding disaster, but at the same time highly concrete, and knowable" (Goodman, J. 2009).

Understood as a largely anthropogenic phenomenon,[1] climate change is setting off erratic weather patterns and environmental changes that threaten the livelihood, stability, and survival of the planet. Communities, scientists, farmers, activists, academics, and journalists around the world are sounding the clarion call about these devastating impacts, advocating for sustainable practices and deep changes to every facet of our lives from the macro logic of global capitalism to the per capita consumption of energy for transportation, food production, heat, and air conditioning. (IPCC; 350.org; Evans 2010; Gallagher 2012-2013; Goodman 2009; Grossman 2009-2013; Hansen 2013; McKibben 2008; McKibben 2012). Climate change poses intense challenges to political and economic structures. The social and political effects of climate change stand to be the most devastating, as catastrophic weather patterns cause food insecurity, mass migration, and infrastructure collapse, making the globe more vulnerable to violence, militarism and the violation of human rights. As Michael Klare stated at a local teach-in on climate change: "There will be mass migration, anti-immigrant violence, state collapse, war – that's how we'll experience climate change. [The social and political effects] will be more brutal than the climate effects" (Climate Change Teach-In, 2012).

Climate change and its effects, are fundamentally driven and shaped by global power and inequality (Roberts and Park 2006). Climate scholars and activists underscore that the countries most responsible for climate change are the wealthy powers represented by the global north (Evans 2010; Giddens 2011); and even more specifically, the suburban centers of North America (Creech and Brown 2000); while the burden of climate change is suffered most acutely by low-income and indigenous communities (Byrne et al 2009; Clancy et al 2007; Crate & Nuttall 2009; Giddens 2011; Honor the Earth; Jones 2008; Roberts and Park 2006; Robinson 2013), and especially by women who are most responsible for social reproduction (Lambrou and Piana 2006; Cappello and Harcourt 2009; Robinson 2013). Some have compared climate change to a world war, with the global south in the "immediate firing line" (Goodman 2009; McKibben in Ostrander 2011). The effects of climate change are already so devastating on the ability of people in the southern hemisphere to provide for their families, that global leaders are beginning to frame climate change as a fundamental issue of human rights (Robinson 2013); while many also underscore the vulnerability of all populations to extreme weather events, food insecurity, rising energy costs; and water depletion (Goodman 2009; Klare 2012; McKibben 2012; Robinson 2013).

Climate change is shaping narratives of global crisis and opportunity, and it is a driver of social action. Numerous scholars and writers see climate change as a potential catalyst for deep societal change, especially for global capitalist frameworks of extractive, exploitative, growth economies (Klein 2011; McKibben in Ostrander), bringing with it an opportunity for adopting new, efficient and environmentally friendly resources to fuel

economic and human life (Klare 2012). Influential entities such as the Intergovernmental

Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2007), as well as activists currently emphasize that

local, democratic participatory processes are key to creating a response that is not only

environmentally sound, but also socially just (Costello 2011; Ageyman 2008; Evans

2010):

> "[we need] an alternative worldview to rival the one at the heart of the ecological crisis – this time, embedded in interdependence rather than hyper-individualism, reciprocity rather than dominance and cooperation rather than hierarchy" (Klein, 2012).

The discourse of justice is sounding in many different spaces, not just marginal or radical

ones. In different academic and activist areas, including economics, climate science,

environmental justice activism and labor organizing, scholars and activists are talking

about the imperative to see justice as integral to sustainability. Communities are

grappling with how to address climate change. They are articulating frameworks that on

the face of things sound transformative in orientation. This dissertation takes this

discourse as its starting point.

**Situating the Dissertation Research**

While many scholars and writers are articulating public positions on climate change, it

has been noted that sociologists have not yet taken great interest in studying the ways that

people are responding to these changes or analyzing the barriers and bridges to

integrating social and environmental sustainability (Lever-Tracy 2008; Passerini 1998).

This dissertation looks at local, on-the-ground activity in sustainability – particularly

activity that takes on the notion of what Klein, McKibben, Byrne and others refer to as

the need for paradigmatic change in the direction of environmentalism *and* justice.

Through ethnographic research, I explore what local responses to climate change look like on the ground. In short, this dissertation is an ethnography of a local network of actors and organizations who are responding to climate change, centered on those who define sustainability as integrally connected to justice. In it, I heed a call that is present in the literature, of the need for more research on sustainability that gives attention to "specific actors and their relative involvements" as well as to "the networking of organizations" and "the trajectory of the spread of ideas" (Haluza-DeLay and Fernhout 2011).

This ethnography looks at a network of local activity that includes three organizations which focus on different kinds of sustainability and justice work. These organizations are: *High Road*, a community and labor organization that facilitates community roundtables on sustainability and justice issues; *Democratic Energy*, a clean energy and energy efficiency products and services company whose mission includes being part of a multi-race, multi-class movement for a just and sustainable future; and *Green Net*, a networking organization that facilitates panel presentations on sustainability topics with a focus on building new green buildings and retrofitting old ones. The data also include sustainability fairs, municipal meetings, and teach-in events. (More on this in Chapter 2). I analyze this network of activity through the lens of the concept of an "emerging public" to show that the individuals and organizations in this local area constitute more than discrete individuals or organizations. As members of a web of social actors who engage the issue of sustainability and justice in the face of climate change, they are part of a public in the making.

## A Case of a Public in the Making

I draw here from Bruno Latour's work, which provided me with crucial theoretical footing from which to engage the range of messy ethnographic data I collected. I agree with Latour's assessment that central to fostering an effective response to the ultimate tension between economic, social and environmental sustainability described in mainstream and activist media, as well as a burgeoning literature on climate change, is the development of a "public" that can activate democratic participation and democratic action (Latour 2010). Publics consist of people exerting political agency in spaces and in interactions that are distinct from state and market interactions, though they may be shaped by or seek to influence state and market processes. (I will elaborate on this more in the literature review section below). Latour's perspective is that climate change presents a problem that has no public to go along with it, or at least, no audible public. In this dissertation, I show that publics responding to climate change are in the process of being composed. People are engaging these issues. And they are coming together. The question is how? And how effective are they at making this process equitable?

Again, drawing from Latour, I insert this research in a framework that asks questions about the contradictions between the capacity of experts and the capacity of the public at large in addressing social problems. Latour asserts that climate change is ultimately a public problem that social institutions are ill-equipped to handle. As such, one key imperative for coming up with solutions to global environmental crises which are intricately tied up with how the globe is socially and economically organized, is the

development of vibrant publics. This dissertation starts from this theoretical assumption, and reflects on the process of how one such set of climate change publics is emerging.

As Latour and others assess, it is publics, more than politicians or technical experts by themselves that can engage the myriad controversies associated with addressing climate change, especially because the type of change that is in question involves re-envisioning virtually all forms of social organization including economics, education, energy systems, home heating, sewage treatment plants, transportation, and factory production to name just a few. In articulating the necessity of publics to do this work, Latour advocates for "making possible the representation - in all meanings of the word - of the issues to be tackled" (Latour 2010, 229) in order to build momentum for the kind of interaction necessary to create sustained engagement, particularly at the level of activating our collective and contested knowledge. Latour argues that nothing short of a transformation of the tools of representation is necessary, in order to activate democratic, representative power that can lead us to global agreements amidst the tangle of interests that inhere in climate change: "How can you have a 'representative democracy' without changing the forms and the forums by which the issues are represented? The Public is to be composed, and the State rediscovered." (Latour 2010b).

The local communities I researched do this "representation" work up to a point. They are busy naming the issues as they see them. And as such they are in the act of producing new publics. As Gibson and Graham write: ". . . the scale of environmental crisis we are part of is creating a new "we" and convening new publics on this planet" (Gibson-Graham 2011:1). Gibson and Graham's work documents and visiblizes new publics as

well as new economic activity that is already being generated by unprecedented global crises caused by unsustainable capitalist processes. Through the act of rendering climate change issues publicly visible, facilitating public gatherings, and engaging in a network of relatively open source activity, the people and organizations in this ethnography are doing the work that Latour calls for, and that Gibson and Graham notice is already happening on a global scale. These individuals and organizations are activating a nascent public that is the basis upon which social, economic, and environmental changes can be driven. They are a case of a public in the making (Luker 2010).

As Eliasoph shows, people create themselves and their interests in interaction with one another, and through the civic practices of local group activity, whether these are explicitly activist or not. People are not just formulating their interests and making them public – they are in fact creating the very public itself. (Eliasoph 1996, 263). Following Eliasoph, I analyze the social interactions that occur in these settings as civic practices, or "footings" in the public sphere, which "both register and create the everyday settings of public life" (Eliasoph 1996, 268). Thus, I argue that the social interactions I observed in this ethnography of local clean energy and climate change activity, constitute the making of an emerging green public.

The tricky part however, is the issues of "tools" as Latour puts it, and what John Dewey refers to as "method." The people I studied are engaged in a construction of the green economy; an articulation of possible ways to practice and reach sustainability and justice; and a conversation that challenges old paradigms in an attempt to create new local systems of sustainability and resilience. But creating effective spaces and processes in

which to articulate the issues to be tackled is crucial and less acknowledged as key to social outcomes. What are the ways in which these publics are being composed? How are they structured? What methods are used to articulate and "represent" the issues to be tackled?

As this literature attests, an emerging public is in the process of being composed. And as I show in chapter 3, it draws heavily from both environmental justice and sustainability discourses. The environmental justice framework in particular, infuses the representation of climate change mitigation and adaptation with the imperatives of procedural and distributive justice (Bullard et al. 2008) which stems from political visions of participatory democracy and the equitable production and distribution of resources. Asking what the nature of this public is, and taking a deeper look at how it is being created is one way in to study how discourses of justice and sustainability are represented (or not) in the structure and processes of the interactions of people on the ground. Though difficult to capture with the kind of definitiveness that social science seeks for its own strategies of legitimacy in the production of knowledge, the concept of publics allows me to think through the substance and processes of how local communities interact and engage the problem of climate change.

**Publics: Literature Review**

I was drawn to the concept of publics for several reasons. On the one hand, the concept allowed me to frame some very messy data that included such disparate social interactions as informal conversations, expert panels, community outreach events, and business transactions. It gave me a useful and appropriate "unit of analysis" — a

container for the many interactions I was studying. While this helped me ease my way though the ethnographic data, this particular instrumentality is not what I was after as a theorist. What really drew me in to use the concept, and to continue using it as my data took shape, was the potential for publics to be a space of agency — agency as linked to the emerging discourse of sustainability and justice. That is, I was most interested in exploring how emerging publics were able to engage their social change potential to integrate justice with sustainability, particularly in contrast to state and market processes and institutions, whose interests are thoroughly entrenched in global systems of production, consumption, and economic relations that are inherently unsustainable for people, and for the planet.

As I looked at publics as sites of potential agency — I began to see the ways that certain approaches and dynamics within the structure and process of public formation enabled agency, while others constrained it. In my research, three main tensions within the structure of emerging publics came to light: discursive tensions between sustainability and justice; procedural tensions between valuing expert knowledge and valuing experiential knowledge; and structural tensions between the intention to create participatory spaces and the reality of stratified publics, particularly as concerned the divide between a community of experts on the one hand, and concerned citizens on the other. Each of these tensions inhered within the structure and process of publics, and shaped the potential of emerging green publics to effect social change. While this is a heady list, chapters 3, 4, and 5 will clarify what exactly I mean by these tensions, and how they shaped the effectiveness of emerging publics. In what follows in this section, I

will explain the concept of publics as it exists in the literature, and explain its specific usefulness for this research.

While I draw from social movement theory and frameworks, I emphasize the concept of publics because it provides me with a framework that is more specifically tied to questions about participatory justice, representation and recognition, in contrast to the literature on social movements which is generally more closely tied to questions about how people and resources are mobilized to contest the resource distribution, ideology, and/or policies driven by specific powerholders (Tilly 1993). Social movements make contentious political and public claims on powerholders for the purpose of democratic inclusion at the level of ideology, cultural recognition, institutional policy, and/or state resources. Publics are one way to conceptualize the space and the interaction through which social movement organizing takes place. Publics engage the questions raised by movements (Melucci 1993), allowing us to see how ideas take shape on the ground and in interactions between individuals, organizations, and communities. The concept of the public allows me to see how questions raised by the movements are made visible (or not); questions which are raised in large part by sustainability and environmental justice movements (more on this in chapter 3). The concept of the public also allows me to study the relationships internal to the public.

I found the concept of publics to be a useful analytical tool that was large enough to encompass the range of data I collected, and specific enough to ask questions about social justice in terms of representation and the distribution of resources, including the production and dissemination of knowledge. Publics are the wheels that can set

democracy in motion. Publics constitute the on-the-ground interaction, large and small, of people articulating their interests and their identities, activating awareness, sharing resources, and generating action. At their best, publics create openings that serve as a wedge to shake up the stasis that tends to inhere in the sphere of the economy on the one hand, and the state on the other.

What are the origins of this term and what aspects of its etymology and conceptual apparatus am I engaging here? The literature on publics is closely tied to political theory, especially as concerns democratic states. The notion of publics arises out of the idea that industrial and post-industrial capitalist democracies are comprised of three sectors: the State, the Market, and Civil Society. Civil society is understood by political scientists and sociologists as referring especially to the social body of citizenship, although recent research speaks to the fact that there are transnational publics which are not necessarily bounded or defined by a nation-state (Fraser 2007; Thayer 2010). Civil society encompasses the citizens of a state who share certain fundamental rights, including the right to participation in and protection by the state (Emirbayer and Sheller 734-735). This is the broad brush notion. It is important to keep in mind however, that the broad brush distinction of a Civil Society is susceptible to a flattening effect that does not account for material differences in political access, political power, or social representation, and often operates in such a way as to represent the "closed association of modern elite groups" such that its ideal as a site for political engagement is seriously compromised by the actual forms that this political engagement has taken (Chatterjee 2004).

The notion of publics is both more specific and more fluid than the notion of the civil

sphere. Habermas' work represents a theoretical starting point for the concept in the literature. The public sphere, described by Habermas as essentially the public civil sphere, is a concept that tries to formulate more specifically the deliberative spaces forged by public discourse,[2] with an eye to understanding and assessing democratic processes. Central to the formulation of the public sphere is its role as a discursive space in which private citizens make reasoned arguments that are communicated through print media as well as through informal and formal community conversations to make claims on the state (Habermas 1991; Cody 2011).

Habermas's ideal of the public as a site for inclusive democratic practice has tended to bracket the reality of social inequality in actual publics (Fraser 1990; Calhoun 2002). Theorists have shown how the public, or public space, is shaped by hegemonic and counter hegemonic processes (Fraser 1990, Thayer 2010), and also becomes another space for subordination to be enacted (Laclau & Mouffe). Publics reflect power dynamics embedded in the society, even as they might organize to redress social and power inequities (Fraser 1990; Thayer 2010; Calhoun 2002). While dominant publics imagine themselves as bearers of universal ideas that can make legitimate claims on the state (Warner 2002), counter publics struggle to secure non-hegemonic spaces free from the exigencies of the market and neoliberal state policy, even as they may also make claims on the state (Thayer 2010). Counterpublics are more aware of their subordinate status and therefore find themselves in a dialectic process whereby they seek to create insider spaces free from the influence of dominant publics, while also asserting political change in the face of the wider public (Fraser 1990; Warner 2002; Cody 2011).

In this research, the publics I studied had both hegemonic and counterhegemonic impulses. Useful to cite here is Andrew Jamison's conceptualization of the ways that people engage with knowledge about climate change. Jamison suggests that there are three main positions that people take in relation to climate change knowledge. In other words, there are three ways that people respond to the virtually unanimous scientific consensus that greenhouse gases are causing global warming and subsequently putting a range of social, economic and environmental systems at risk. These are the dominant, oppositional and emergent positions. The dominant position is that which highlights the importance of reducing emissions and transitioning to a low-carbon society. The oppositional stance is that taken by climate deniers and climate skeptics – those that question the basis of the scientific consensus around global warming. The emergent position is the position that this dissertation takes a close look at. It is the position that "is associated with those who are convinced that climate change is occurring, and that it will have serious consequences if it is not abated, but who stress the importance of dealing with climate change in ways that take issues of justice and fairness seriously into account" (Jamison 2010, 811). In this dissertation, I am looking at publics who take an emergent position to climate change.

Like Habermas, I use publics here, to define a discursive space. However, unlike Habermas, I focus on micro-interactions to show how the public is emerging. I do not see the public as an entity that is merely located in speech acts, nor one that is necessarily positioned vis a vis the state or that tacitly assumes boundedness by a nation-state (Fraser 2007), although publics might make demands upon the state, and although state and market forces can constrain or enable the intricacies of public interaction. Many of the

meetings I attended for example, can be understood as sites in which a public is forming around issues of climate change. This public engagement is not so much about making reasoned arguments, as it is about exploring knowledge in order to imagine a different way of doing things. In this way, my approach to publics follows Dewey who said that publics are always in search of themselves, while also ascribing to the potential of publics to enact participatory justice and democratic engagement.

I understand the public sphere to be made up of different publics which act as discursive motors of democracy -- for articulating as well as representing collective interests. While theorists see publics as drivers of political change (Dewey 1927, 2012; Luque 2005), I employ the term here as a *potential* driver of change. In my research, I conceptualize publics as entities that in principle, are seen as always open to membership, comprising a "relation among strangers" (Warner 2002: 55); existing in spaces that are distinct, yet inclusive of the institutional, and rooted in the "active uptake" of issues and ideas of common interest (Warner 2002: 60; Dewey 1927, 2012; Habermas 1991). The organizations and events I analyzed were characterized by this "active uptake" of sustainability and justice issues among strangers. All of the meetings I attended for example, were at least in principle, open to anyone who was interested.

It is not just issues that bring people together to deliberate and create action steps, however. Identity and creativity are also key. Participating in publics is inherently creative and performative, not just deliberative. People come together out of choice, not only necessity; they are motivated by solidarity, not merely issues of material and social import (Calhoun 155). As Warner puts it:

> "Public discourse says not only: "Let a public exist," but "Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way." It then goes out in search of confirmation that such a public exists, with greater or lesser success - success being further attempts to cite, circulate and realize the world-understanding it articulates. Run it up the flagpole, and see who salutes. Put on a show, see who shows up" (Warner 2002: 82).

This kind of solidarity existed loosely in this data. It was especially true for one of the

organizations I studied, *High Road* which held roundtables on sustainability. *High Road*'s

roundtables were an example of "running" their ideas of sustainability and justice "up the

flagpole" to see who might join (see chapter 4 for more detail on this point).

My empirical data helps underscore the way that publics can be multiple and shifting

because they arise from multiple and shifting concerns. It can be difficult to freeze the

social activity and meaning they encompass, or capture the boundaries of any one public,

and that was certainly the case for my fieldwork. Climate change in particular, is an issue

with global implications that touch on so many disparate technical, scientific,

institutional, and cultural issues, that it can be hard to rally a public around such diverse

and complicated issues and interests. Dewey's quote from almost a hundred years ago

captures this situation well:

> "The ramification of the issues before the public is so wide and intricate, the technical matters involved are so specialized, the details are so many and so shifting that the public cannot for any length of time identify and hold itself. It is not that there is no public, no large body of persons having a common interest in the consequences of social transactions. There is too much public, a public too diffused and scattered and too intricate in composition. And there are too many publics, for conjoint actions which have indirect, serious, and enduring consequences are multitudinous beyond comparison, and each one of them crosses the others and generates its own group of persons especially affected with little to hold these different publics together in an integrated whole" (Dewey 1927, 2012: 116).

While the use of publics allowed me to contain the interactions I was studying at one

level, at another level, the container of publics seemed hopelessly flawed given the way that there were  "too many publics" to make sense of any of them. Here, Eliasoph's work was useful in helping me ground the data with this concept, even as the conceptual sand seemed to slip through my fingers. Eliasoph highlights "the patterns of civility in everyday life" in order to show that the power of publics inheres in live interaction. Publics have the potential to create openings for conversation that can help people negotiate what are always "overlapping, contradictory and fluid interests" (Eliasoph 1996: 267). Following Eliasoph then, I frame the interactions that constitute my data as emerging publics which created openings for conversation in real time.

Emirbayer and Sheller provided further conceptualization that helped me stick with the concept of publics and use it to engage messy and disparate data. They assert that "Actual publics must be understood as ever-changing, emergent, and multiple, since the interplay of public expansion, contraction, and reaction to new situations continually elicits new genres of communication, new styles of contestation, new solidarities or enmities, and new settings for interaction" (Emirbayer and Sheller 1998). Moreover, "Publics are not simply "spaces" or "worlds" where politics is discussed, as the popular "public sphere" idea suggests, but rather, interstitial *networks* of individuals and groups acting as citizens" (Emirbayer and Sheller 1998, 738).

It is their open-endedness, their "anti-structure" (Emirbayer and Sheller) that holds the most creative promise for publics as a site of agency and potential for change, and that drives my conceptual intentions in using it. As Cody writes, "this element of agency is precisely what is so attractive about publics for theories of emancipation, be they liberal,

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nationalist, or radical" (Cody 2011, 40). This idea of agency is threaded throughout the dissertation. Through the use of the concept of the public, I am asking questions about how much agency people bring to bear in relation to the ideas and frameworks that drive movements for sustainability and justice — and I am asking where this agency is located. I start from the premise that publics, as spaces, and as processes of people meeting together as strangers to engage particular issues have agentic potential — and I also ask how — how can people make more of a wedge between the constraints of the market and the state? Essentially, the concept of publics also helps me ask — how can publics be more "public?"  And how can they be more agentic? This is my driving question.

The viability of the public as a politically healthy site of effective change-making often seems elusive at best, and I wrangled with this throughout my research and writing. Warner argues that to attribute agency to publics is "an extraordinary fiction" (Warner 2002: 89), and it certainly seemed at times, like I was straining to locate a public in what I was seeing, in order to cope with the disordered nature of my field research. In significant ways, my data also reflected a dynamic in which it could be argued that if there was a public, it was grossly compromised by the two other forces in the iconographic trinity of democratic political theory: the state and the market.

Calhoun argues that "the global public sphere lags dramatically behind the less democratic, less choice-oriented dimensions of global society (Calhoun 2002, 171), and this resonated with me as I experienced the tenacious hold of market and state forces on the interactions I observed in the field. Analysts have also found publics to be hopelessly beholden to powerful interests (Lippman 1922); severely compromised by "processes of

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commoditization, monopolization, and competition among private interests over state-directed resource allocation" (Cody 2011; Habermas 1991); or dampened by the fear of disagreement, especially in more public, institutional settings (Eliasoph 1996). These were all issues that compromised the potential and the power of the emerging public that I witnessed in the field, leaving me to wonder how useful the concept was to wrestle with the questions about how sustainability and justice movements operated on the ground in a local context.

It turned out that it was a very useful concept for my research. As I analyzed my field data, I identified three areas that were fundamental to creating openings for agency in emerging publics: discourse, knowledge production, and the structure of publics. At the same time, my data revealed significant tensions in these areas which constrained the political possibilities of these emerging publics. That is, while the discourse on sustainability and justice inspired publics to form and to act, the discursive tensions between sustainability and justice constrained those very efforts. Similarly, knowledge production revealed itself to be central to the task of tackling the issues at hand, yet the tension between expert and experiential knowledge production exerted a dampening effect on the vibrancy and creativity of public interaction. Lastly, the formation of this public brought together an interesting, and potentially fruitful combination of engineers and activists, policy makers and grandparents, however, the tension between holding up a community of experts on the one hand, versus generating a community of concerned citizens on the other also served to constrain the agency of this public.

While emerging publics were interested in integrating justice with sustainability, the

contradictions between these legacies were unexamined and often tabled for convenience

sake, making it difficult to nail down actionable goals. The contradiction between

sustainability and capitalism was skirted more often than it was dealt with in the

interactions of the local emerging public I observed, and it hampered its capacity to

address issues of inequality and social justice. I explore this further in chapters 3 and 4.

Theoretically, my research revealed that the problem of publics is also integrally

connected to the problem of knowledge, and I argue that this is particularly true in the

context of climate change. While it can be argued that the problem of knowledge inheres

in most environmental politics such as in the case of nuclear energy or genetically

modified foods, I argue that climate change presents both a quantitative and qualitative

difference in the way knowledge becomes a key fulcrum for organizing and social

change. For one, climate change affects all constituencies. For another, the domino effect

that climate change launches, both in terms of its impact and any intentions to redress or

adapt to its effects, touches upon an inordinate number of technical, economic, legal and

political structures and processes that demand a depth and breadth of working knowledge

that can be overwhelming. Some have described climate change as the mother of

environmental justice concerns (Stephenson, 2014). It is also the mother of the problem

of knowledge for organizing change.

On the one hand, members of publics need knowledge to engage discursively on topics of

concern to them. As such, members of publics are partially beholden to experts who can

extend or offer knowledge that is relevant to engaging with specific concerns. How that

knowledge is obtained, shared, disseminated, and engaged is deeply relevant to participatory justice and social equity. Publics have the potential to engage facts at the level at which those facts intersect with real lives. It is members of publics who know how an issue is affecting them. Publics can engage the realities of climate change and engage a process in which participants figure out what will work for them, as people. In my field data however, people spent an inordinate amount of time listening to experts explain the ins and outs of climate science, biodiesel, solar, and micro-hydro technology, among other things. It was rare to witness collective knowledge building processes, though they did also occur. (See chapter 5 for more detail).

Lastly, my research confirms that the problem of publics, especially when one considers participatory justice, also lies in the constraints of its formation. As many researchers have shown, this formation is shaped by social stratification, segregation, and conflicting social positionalities. I argue that public formation is also shaped by a tension between a community of experts, on the one hand, and a community of concerned citizens, on the other. The field data revealed an over-emphasis on experts as the true movers and shakers of these publics, a problem which existed in tandem with an emphasis on expert knowledge. This too, constrained the agentic potential of emerging green publics, a fact which was particularly remarkable given the inspired discourse that drove these publics — a discourse that sang the praises of agency in the form of social justice, participatory justice, and democratic justice. At many points, this research revealed a tenacious gap between an inspired vision of sustainability and justice, and real-life points of entry through which to enact that vision. Participants often felt frustrated that they weren't

doing more; that action steps seemed far from the discussions at hand. The data revealed a kind of public incapacity that needed explaining.

The tension and even, at times, the contradiction between the public's capacity to respond to complex problems and the role of experts in responding to those problems is encapsulated by what has come to be known as the Lippman-Dewey debate. In this debate almost a century ago, political philosopher and educational theorist, John Dewey,[3] highlighted the importance of the knowledge of people's own experiences as key to propelling democratic politics through public discourse. Lippman,[4] on the other hand, argued that people needed a class of experts to lead decision making on topics that could not possibly be understood and negotiated by the public. Lippman's political thought expressed a deep skepticism of democratic processes that relied heavily on public opinion and public participation. He argued that because the public could not possibly be informed about each public issue, the public should not be trusted with participatory decision making, especially since their opinions could be easily manipulated by the media and by leaders interested in political and economic gain. His solution to what he saw as the certain vulnerability of participatory democracy to "manufactured consent" and ill-informed decision-making, was to envision a technocratic government in which experts led a kind of level-headed, informed process of decision-making by elected leaders. This vision was fueled by the assumption that experts would be guided by pure knowledge and the ability to know what was best for the whole; and the assumption that ordinary citizens were largely ignorant and could not see past their own narrow self-interest. He failed to see how technocrats could not be neutral parties, nor how

knowledge is never pure; its production and its uses are always driven by politics (Foucault 1972; Freire 1989; Bell et al. 1990).

John Dewey responded to Walter Lippman, and their opposing perspectives still constitute two main poles in ongoing political debates about the role of citizens and the role of elite experts in democracies. Dewey advocated strongly for public engagement with social policies and decisions. He emphasized that public participation is essential to democratic governance and that the public can not be sidelined from the political process by technocratic expedience. While he agreed that this process was difficult, he did not see it as impossible. Moreover, he asserted that one of the tasks of a democratic society was to nurture the processes and social structures necessary to create a more informed and democratically active public such as the development of progressive education. In contrast to Lippman, Dewey assumed that the public was capable of self-governance. This is a position I also take.

Dewey warned against a class of experts who undermine democracy by conflating knowledge of the technical terms of a debate with knowledge of the key public issues and possible solutions.  He used the analogy of shoes and shoemakers to make his point: "The man [sic] who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches, even if the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied" (Dewey 1927; 2012, 154). Dewey threw in his lot with those who highlight the democratic potential of the public sphere. While democracies were vulnerable to becoming oligarchies in the over-valuation of "experts" who set the terms of public debate, public space could always be claimed and reclaimed to 'free the processes of inquiry.' In his words: "The essential

need, in other words, is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion, and persuasion. That is the problem of the public" (Dewey 1927; 2012, 155).

It might seem that the concept of the public is hopelessly abstract and politically stagnant— an analytical framework conjured up by democratic idealists who parade its value in academic journals, political speeches, or talking-head spots. Publics are not pure spaces either. It is useful however, to talk about the space that is being created when people interact that is not entirely driven by the state or the market. Publics hold the promise of agency in the form of discursive interactions. I use this concept to ask questions about inclusiveness, potential for change, and the use and influence of different modes of communication in the emerging climate change publics I studied from 2008-2014. While the literature on publics is clear that discourse forms publics and propels them; and that this process engages important democratic possibilities even as it also suffers from numerous constraints; the specifics of this public formation process are less clear.

I argue that knowledge production is a key process in the formation of publics that has a significant effect on the potential for democratic inclusion; the creation of new imaginaries; the development of new social solidarities; and the potential for social change. Knowledge production is an important way to think about the problem of method, especially in the context of climate change. The dramatic implications of climate change demands new knowledge. One hundred years after Dewey's thoughts on methods of democracy, how much do debates about climate change mitigation, adaptation, sustainability and justice turn on the knowledge of experts? What are the methods of

inquiry and the conditions of debate? What is the process of knowledge production in these emerging public spaces? And what can this field tell us about the relationship between public space, knowledge production, democratic inclusion, and agency?

I am also interested in the specifics of this new public. Who is this public and why? What are people able to do and not able to do because of what it is? People don't yet know what they think about climate change. It is still a very open field. Who is invited to participate and engage? Who attends these gatherings? What kinds of public spaces are these? What kind of subjects are being made? These questions focus on the extent of inclusiveness that Nancy Fraser, among others, writes is a condition for a normative democratic notion of the public sphere (Fraser 2007).

Another set of questions refer to the participatory quality of public engagement (Fraser 2007). How democratic are these spaces and activities? What kinds of social change and political methods are being generated? How much are these publics able to build on the imperatives of distributive and participatory justice formulated by environmental justice discourse that inspires so much of the climate change discourse? I argue that knowledge production is central to the process of participatory justice and effective public engagement. To this end, my research questions include: How does knowledge production shape public formation? And how does the public shape the knowledge production? What kind of belonging is being fostered?

The promise of publics is that their structures and processes of interaction can produce useful cross-fertilizations of knowledge, ideas, and perspectives that in turn, might generate multiple solutions to complex problems. Based on current empirical data, this

dissertation brings to bear John Dewey's classic questions about the methods of democracy as key problems of the public. As social movement scholar, Andrew Jamison, writes: "Much will depend on how successful 'movement intellectuals' in an emergent movement of climate justice will be in developing public spaces where scientists, engineers, and citizens can come together to learn from each other and bring their different kinds of knowledge into fruitful combinations" (Jamison 2010 : 820). In my fieldwork, engineers and activists, citizens and policy makers came together in public spaces, yet struggled to bring their knowledge together in fruitful ways. Jamison impels us to think about the quality of knowledge production that public interaction creates.

This dissertation also draws inspiration from Latour's assessment that climate change is ultimately a public problem that social institutions are ill-equipped to handle, not least because states and markets around the globe are thoroughly ensconced in a logic of growth capitalism and modernity that is rooted in a brutal and ongoing history of imperialism, colonization, and the extraction of global resources, including people, for profit (Smith 1999; Shiva 2005). Looking at local activity with the framework of publics allows me to ask questions about how effective these public spaces are at handling this planetary problem. It also allows me to assess the strengths and the pitfalls of emerging climate change publics.

An issue that carries in its wake such devastating economic, environmental, and political ramifications, climate change demands engagement with an overwhelming amount of knowledge — knowledge that ranges from the scientific and technical to the political and procedural.  People come together to find out what is to be known, and to share their own

hard-earned knowledge. People are taking awkward steps to build on what we know to produce new ideas and practices. Ultimately, the knowledge we have so far is not enough to successfully transcend our planetary predicament. We are going to need new ways of building off of that knowledge to produce new ideas and practices. However, in order to be democratic and equitable, publics must be able to engage fruitful combinations of knowledge without handing over the right-to-know or to produce new knowledge solely to experts. This dissertation teases out discursive public interactions to reveal the internal processes of the formation of an emerging public with an eye towards examining how knowledge production is central to the project of integrating justice and sustainability.

**Outline of the Chapters**

In terms of the progression of ideas in this dissertation, my starting point is the discursive: how are individuals and organizations conceptualizing the relationship between justice *and* sustainability? After discussing my research and methodology in chapter 2, I give a brief genealogy of environmental justice and sustainability in chapter 3, to show how the concepts of sustainability and justice arose out of specific political and institutional contexts. I argue that discursive forms of sustainability and justice are embedded in other discourses such as the green economy, green jobs, and sustainable capitalism. I also argue that the tensions between the discursive orientations of justice, on the one hand, and sustainability, on the other, are replicated as they resurface in discursive frameworks that relate to climate change organizing.

In chapter 4, I turn to my ethnographic observations to reveal how local communities

grapple with these contradictory discursive threads to articulate specific visions of change and to search for effective points of entry. I show that the problem of agency surfaces as a persistent problem for emerging publics. Further, I show that the tension between sustainability and justice reflected in the discourse of climate change at large, is also reflected in local activity on the ground. I argue that this tension constrains the ability of local movements to be effective in generating change. Lastly, I argue that the conceptual and political tension between justice and sustainability is one of several tensions which constrains the agentic potential of emerging publics that are trying to respond to the realities of climate change.

In chapters 5 and 6, I show how emerging publics enable or constrain participatory and equitable community action through the processes of knowledge production and public formation. New publics arise out of multiple discursive interactions — interactions that, among other things, produce particular kinds of knowledge and knowledge practices. In chapter 5, I explore how knowledge practices shape the formation of this public. I argue for a different pedagogy of activism as a way to address some of the structural and processual inequality that is reproduced within these emerging publics, even as many of their participants argue for equity and justice as integral to moving forward in the context of a planetary climate crisis. In chapter 6, I show what kinds of publics are emerging out of local climate change organizing as a result of stratification and segregation within them, as well as of the tension between different kinds of knowledge production that inhere in the way public participation is generated. I argue that there is a tension in these emerging publics between a community of experts and a community of concerned

citizens. In this chapter, I focus on the ways in which processes of public formation have

great potential for agency and participation, yet compromise that agency in their search

for expertise.

These three data chapters come together to show that the agentic potential of emerging

publics to produce social changes that benefit all citizens is constrained by the three

tensions observed in this data: the tension between the discursive threads of justice on the

one hand, and sustainability on the other; the tension between expert and experiential

knowledge; and the tension between a desire for inclusive publics, and the reality of their

stratification. In the conclusion, I argue that if we can see these tensions more clearly, we

could work to improve the social change potential of emerging green publics, and make

publics more effective as sites for unleashing the collective imagination, as well as for

generating change that is socially just.

Substantively then, this dissertation is about how local communities are using and

applying ideas about sustainability and justice in their engagement with climate change;

and how this discursive process shapes the making of an emerging public. On a

theoretical level, this dissertation looks at the circular and co-constructing relationship

between discourse, knowledge production and the formation of publics to show how

emerging green publics can be more productive sites and processes in the quest for a just

and sustainable future.

**<u>Summary of the Arguments</u>**

One of the most compelling things about this data is that the people at the table, the

people who came to leadership development trainings, who attended teach-ins or conferences, or who stopped at outreach tables at supermarkets to chat about biodiesel — came from a place of being open to the complexity of the problems we are facing and to the struggle to find solutions. People sat down together to try something, whether or not they thought of themselves as experts, or whether or not they had the cultural lenses of antiracism or the theoretical frameworks of political organizing. The people I encountered in this ethnography had the courage to sit with the seemingly insurmountable; to straddle across intractable differences, and to engage the issues. Given this, what can we learn? What can we know about the potential of these social processes to see us through to the other side of our planetary crisis? As a sociologist, a PhD student, a citizen, and a parent, I sit at this juncture also. Thus, the ethnographic data and analytical renderings that make up the chapters in this dissertation also represent an attempt to parse out what is possible when people get together, despite the daily demands of work, debt, family, and domestic labor; despite crushing poverty, racism, and violence, to do something meant to move us all forward.

To this end, I build the following arguments in this dissertation:

1. I argue that local activity that people are engaged in to address climate change can be understood productively as an emerging public. I focus specifically on a public that is concerned with integrating issues of justice with sustainability. Pursuant to literature on publics, I conceptualize this public as a moving target that is constituted by a network of interactions between people and organizations who are interested in addressing and responding to climate change; who articulate their concerns with one another; and who

share resources and generate action. I define this public as distinct from market and state interactions though members of this public also seek to influence and are also shaped by market and state processes.

2. I argue that agency is a central problem in this emerging public; that the data reveal a persistent gap between the discourse of sustainability and justice and the ability to implement specific actions that incorporate these two ideals in tandem.

3. I identify three areas that are fundamental to creating openings for agency in emerging publics: discourse, knowledge production, and the structure of publics. And I argue that there are significant tensions in these areas which constrain the political possibilities of these emerging publics.

4. One tension is the discursive tension between sustainability and justice in which the logic of capitalism has not quite been undermined by a stated commitment to integrate social and environmental justice. This has implications for how effective organizing can be that situates itself as sustainable and just.

5. Another tension is about the uses of knowledge. Addressing climate change through sustainability and justice organizing requires awareness of and engagement with an overwhelming amount of knowledge areas — including knowledge of technologies like heating, solar and wind; climate science; economic knowledge; legal knowledge; policy knowledge; sociological knowledge; and regionally specific knowledge. This has

implications for the kinds of organizing that are necessary in order for the process and outcomes to be equitable and just. A new way of knowing, of approaching knowledge, is central to the work of integrating justice with sustainability. People have to invent new knowledge on the ground.

6. A third tension I observed was that the formation of a climate change public straddled a community of professional experts on the one hand, and a community of concerned citizens on the other, while it was also severely limited by regional and national stratification along lines of race, class, and gender. The public is key to working out this knowledge in an equitable way. If the process of moving to a more sustainable system is to be just, the issues to be tackled can not only come from those who are considered experts in their field, or from those who garner political legitimacy because of their social position — they have to come from the way the issues interact with people and their experiences: as elders, as ex-felons, as low-income people, as homeowners, as renters, as Asians, Blacks, Latinos, and whites — in short, these issues have to be tackled by people as citizens, in roles that are not strictly beholden to state and capital interests.

7. Public formation, public participation, and participatory knowledge production in response to climate change, are central to unearthing a diverse set of issues to be known and tackled, and to successfully integrating sustainability and justice. Mapping the terrain of discourse, public formation, and knowledge production, helps to clarify the processes by which we can work more effectively towards the goals of justice and sustainability. More specifically, if we can see the tensions that operate in the discourse, in the

knowledge production, and in the formation of publics, we can work to improve the

social change potential of emerging green publics.

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[1] Climate change is framed and understood as an anthropogenic phenomenon caused by rising levels of carbon in the earth's atmosphere. Fossil fuels, the driving wheels of an industrialized global economy, are the culprits, the main ones consisting mostly of coal-fired electric plants on the one hand, and oil-fueled transportation, heating, and cooling on the other (IPCC 2007; Giddens 2011; McKibben 2012)

[2] In formulating a simplified blueprint for the bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth century, Habermas makes the distinction between private and public aspects of the Civil Sphere. The private civil sphere, which he calls the "authentic public sphere" is defined by the private interests of consumers and family relations, or in other words, "the realm of commodity exchange and social labor." In contrast, the public civil sphere, or "the public sphere" is defined by political opinion as mediated through the publication, consumption and discussion of political arguments put forth in print media (Habermas 1991: 30).

[3] Dewey was a political philosopher and educational theorist who published his responses to Lippman in a review in the New Republic (1922), and more thoroughly in his book, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927).

[4] Walter Lippman was an American journalist who published two highly influential books: *Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1925) which inspired much political thinking about the role of publics, experts, and political representatives in democracy.

# CHAPTER 2
## EMERGING CLIMATE CHANGE PUBLICS:
## METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

**<u>Entry into the field</u>**

In the last eight years, one major way that people in the United States have been

responding to the challenge of climate change is to advocate for a green economy that is

based on the implementation of clean energy systems, new green technologies, and

energy efficiency measures. Early advocates of a green economy emphasized the

imperative to think about sustainability in the face of climate change as deeply

interconnected with social justice.  Charismatic leaders such as Van Jones and Majora

Carter linked the degradation of the earth with the degradation of communities and called

for a vision that solved poverty and climate change at the same time, by providing green

jobs training, green jobs opportunities, and green jobs career ladders to disenfranchised

communities. They infused movements for sustainability in the United States with the

lens of social justice, drawing inspiration from a legacy of environmental justice

literature and activism.[1] People in my community began to use this language to organize

their own local responses to climate change. I entered the field at the height of national

dialogue around green jobs and the green economy in 2008 when emergent discourses

about the green economy, justice and sustainability had reached an audible crescendo.

In 2007, Congress passed the Energy Independence and Security Act, which incorporated

the Green Jobs Act of 2007, authorizing $125 million in green-collar job training

opportunities to train workers in new green industries such as solar, wind and biofuels.

Money for this act was still in the process of being allocated while in June 2009,

Congress earmarked $500 million in Recovery Act funds in training and retraining workers for clean energy jobs, of which $150 million is specifically set aside for job training programs that provide "pathways out of poverty" (Guevarra 2009). In 2008 and 2009, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Washington states each passed Green Jobs legislation providing monies and incentives for green job development in these states (Green for All).

Van Jones, who rose to national fame as the charismatic leader of the green jobs movement until a muckraking campaign by Glenn Beck[2] and Fox News forced him to resign from his position as Special Advisor for Green Jobs in the Obama administration in the Fall of 2009, started a successful and ongoing green collar jobs campaign with the grassroots organization he founded in Oakland, California: the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights. Jones helped to energize the discourse of green jobs with this campaign and with his book, *The Green Collar Economy*. His book was popularized among the liberal elite, and was used as a tool to educate both policy makers and members of the public about the importance of marrying sustainability and justice through the development of green jobs in energy efficiency and renewable energy contracting work. Jones emphasized the promise of green jobs to create what he called, pathways out of poverty for disenfranchised youth, especially youth of color. Jones challenged law makers to "green the ghetto first," and advocated for youth to "put down those handguns and pick up those caulking guns" (Galbraith 2009).

New coalitions and collaborative organizations touting the benefits of green jobs and the green economy began cropping up all over the nation, many of them highly networked

with each other. Majora Carter, of Sustainable South Bronx was one of the first to develop an urban green-collar training program with the creation of the Bronx Environmental Stewardship Training Program in New York. The United Steelworkers and the Sierra Club founded *the Blue-Green Alliance* in 2006, to advocate for policy that "expands the number and quality of jobs in the green economy" (Blue-Green Alliance). Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club helped to found *The Apollo Alliance*, "a coalition of labor, business, environmental, and community leaders working to catalyze a clean energy revolution that will put millions of Americans to work in a new generation of high-quality, green-collar jobs" (Apollo Alliance).

A movement of sorts was afoot. "Green jobs" and "the green economy" were emerging trendy terms that now permeate conflicting, yet intersecting public sectors of environmentalism, labor activism, community activism, policy making, government, and business. While activists emphasized environmental and social justice in their use of these terms, business stakeholders interested in developing green business practices spoke of "the triple bottom line," a phrase that denotes a corporate emphasis on profit, people and the planet.

Inspired by national dialogue and new public policies, organizers in my local community advertised roundtables on green jobs; encouraged people to get educated about sustainability projects at monthly networking events; and invited people to attend panels on climate change. As I entered the field looking to understand what new discourses and practices were emerging, I realized that we were all, myself included, responding to the exigencies of real climate change that high profile climate change activists like Al Gore

and the IPCC had put on the map. The looming dangers of climate change drove initiatives for green industry, green jobs, and visions for a new green economy.

At the same time, many were also wondering – can we do this justly?  Can we rethink social justice at the same time as we rethink energy systems, consumption, production, and employment? As a sociologist interested in issues of race, class, gender and inequality, I was intrigued by the way that the political playing field invoked ideas of justice and equity in tandem with solutions to a global environmental crisis. I wanted to apply my knowledge and interest in social justice to this burgeoning area of social activity and contemporary concern. At first, I entered the field with an inductive approach, guided by the questions: "What does this look like in my community? What do these emerging discourses of justice and sustainability and a new green economy look like on the ground?" "How do these discourses shape democratic participation and distributive justice?

I went to many events, including grassroots meetings, conferences, panels and rallies in the Pioneer Valley, in Boston, Worcester, and Rhode Island, to get a sense of the lay of the land. I first learned about meetings on the internet and through my local paper. As I did this, I narrowed in on work that was being done in the Pioneer Valley. I found several organizations that were engaged in formulating and furthering green economic principles for whom a vision of social justice was integral to their mission. The operating phrase that repeated itself was the intention to create a "just and sustainable future" or a "just and sustainable economy." This was the discursive phrasing that I followed. As I listened to people engaging these issues in interactions such as meetings, trainings and

educational summits, I began to see the relevance of Jamison's climate change positions.

As mentioned in the introduction, Andrew Jamison suggests that there are three main positions that people take in relation to climate change knowledge. These are the dominant, oppositional and emergent positions. The dominant position is that which highlights the importance of reducing emissions and transitioning to a low-carbon society without emphasizing political imperatives that might be central to this transition. The emergent position sees social justice as integral to addressing climate change. The oppositional stance is that taken by climate deniers and climate skeptics – those that question the basis of the scientific consensus around global warming (Jamison 2010, 811).

I did not encounter anyone in these organizations who expressed skepticism about climate change or who identified as a climate change denier. This was partly to be expected given the prevalence of progressive politics in the region I was studying. The one firm consensus among the individuals and organizations I studied is that climate change is a reality. Climate change science was consistently presented as the fulcrum for thinking about alternative economic approaches, clean energy investment, or community resilience planning. Sometimes imperatives for change were voiced as a need for clean energy and energy efficiency; sometimes that imperative was voiced as a clear need to stop the train of global capitalism. The oppositional stance to climate change which dominates U.S. national politics, courtesy of the Koch brothers and Exxon-Mobil, was virtually non-existent, except as a fact that respondents referenced in frustration or with resignation.

A proliferation of local news stories daily describes numerous local sustainability efforts: activists closing a coal plant and advocating for the transformation of the site into a green energy plant; a NIMBY fight over wind power in a rural hill town proud of its new England charm; a new community loan program for local farmers whose greenhouses collapsed in severe weather attributed to climate change; an out-of-state solar company leasing solar panels and setting up arrays on old landfills; an affordable housing project that builds net-zero homes for first-time home buyers; and a fossil fuel divestment initiative at local colleges and universities. The sheer amount of activity suggests that a transition process from a fuel-based economy to another system or set of systems is underway. These activities cohere into a picture that is drawn together by an acknowledgment of an urgent historical moment; by the networked nature of sustainability initiatives; and by a commonality of goals, while also diverging in terms of political philosophy, social change approaches, and market relationships.

This set of activities can be described as a field.  And the field in which these organizations operate includes a mix of Jamison's "dominant" and "emergent" climate change positions (Jamison 2010). While social justice goals were embedded in organizational activities, market exigencies and capitalistic approaches also drove the goals and discursive interactions of these organizations.

The dominant position — that which focuses on clean energy and energy efficiency initiatives is burgeoning in the Pioneer Valley. People spoke of the necessity for profitability; the potential for the market to create sustainability because it would be

cheaper in the long run; the need for creating a market for energy efficiency retrofits; and the urgency for consumer education.

The emergent position that Jamison associates with a politics of justice is less visible in local media, but also quite prevalent as one digs deeper in local sustainability efforts. While outside energy companies make advertising campaigns to get people to lease solar arrays installed by out-of-state labor for profit sent to out-of-state pockets, local organizers emphasize the importance of hiring local solar installers, some of whom are worker-owned, to keep money circulating locally and to promote fair labor practices.

I wanted to know more. In particular, I wanted to know more about how people were implementing visions of sustainability and justice — I was most interested in focusing on what Jamison calls the "emergent" climate change position.

**An Ethnography of Local Organizing in Sustainability and Justice**

I began to follow two organizations in earnest: *Democratic Energy* and *High Road*; as well as a third organization: *Green Net*,[3] whose monthly meetings I attended with sporadic regularity over the course of several years. What they had in common was a vision that incorporated notions of sustainability and justice. I began to attend public meetings at *High Road* in the spring of 2008. I received IRB permission to engage in ethnographic fieldwork and regularly attended both public and private meetings at these three different organizations from the fall of 2011 through the spring of 2014. As I will explain below, the interactions within and between these organizations serve as case

studies of an emerging green public. I also attended local public events that included sustainability conferences, climate justice rallies, and clean energy fairs.

**High Road**

*High Road* is a fledgling non-profit organization that advocates for workers' rights to bargaining power in the emerging green economy, while convening stakeholders for the purposes of greening the labor movement and unionizing the green movement. This organization hosts monthly roundtables which act both as educational presentations, as well as ways to facilitate discussion and challenge local stakeholders to engage in high road economic principles in the projects and programs they are planning, developing, or implementing.

As Emirbayer and Sheller (1998) note, movements and the publics that sustain them, require avenues and processes that convene people as well as ways to educate them on changing and emerging issues. I first chose *High Road* because they invited the public to engage in the question of "what is a green economy?" from the perspective of social justice. As I became more involved, it became clear that one of *High Road*'s roles was to be a convener and to offer a space for networking, learning and dialoguing about sustainability and justice. *High Road* works against inequity by creating networks that are framed according to its vision of social change and social justice. As a convener, *High Road* harnesses power to frame, to position, to advocate for justice and accountability. Although it is small and often struggles to maintain its existence and assert its goals, *High Road*'s orientation is one that is significant to the creation and mobilization of an emerging public.

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My data from this organization include participant observation and ethnographic fieldwork of monthly public meetings, quarterly board meetings, periodic committee meetings, intern interviews and list-serve activity. As a participant-observer I participated in meetings, helped solicit presenters for the monthly roundtable, occasionally wrote minutes for board meetings, helped interview a potential intern, participated in internal organizational emails, and wrote an article for *High Road*'s on-line newsletter.

**Democratic Energy**

The second case study consists of ethnographic fieldwork at a local cooperative I call *Democratic Energy* whose mission is to be a multi-race and multi-class initiative in creating a just and sustainable society. *Democratic Energy* provides renewable energy products and services. It facilitates community-owned energy projects including community funded solar panel installations; solar barn raising; as well as locally-owned or worker-owned business incubation.

I first chose this site because of its stated commitment to sustainability and race and class justice.  As I continued to collect data, it became clear that like *High Road, Democratic Energy* also engaged in convening and educating people on issues pertinent to sustainability and justice by organizing and facilitating leadership retreats and sustainability summits. This provided an interesting way to contrast approaches, especially as concerned knowledge production and its relationship to the formation of publics and to the question of agency. In addition, *Democratic Energy* also offered key insight into the nuts and bolts of developing green businesses and selling green products

and services.  The day-to-day exigencies of the economic realm were central to its activities and approaches, providing me with insight into the intricacies of applying a just and sustainable framework to economic activity.

My data at this organization includes participant observation and field work at annual meetings, quarterly leadership trainings, monthly local organizing council meetings, products and services presentations, organizing meetings, and periodic community outreach through phone-a-thons and tabling at fairs, home shows and supermarkets. As a participant observer, I participated in local organizing meetings, wrote minutes, helped table events, wrote a report of qualitative findings for a member survey, and helped organize events.


**<u>Green Net</u>**

The third case study consists of an organization I call *Green Net*, a networking organization which eventually incorporated as a non-profit, whose purpose is to support local initiatives in green building and sustainable living practices through monthly educational and networking events that feature local presenters and promote local educational and business initiatives in sustainability.

I began collecting data at *Green Net* because it consisted of a local effort at generating interest in just and sustainable processes that held public meetings I could easily attend. I continued to attend meetings there because it became clear that *Green Net* was a major player in facilitating the emergence of local green publics. Many of the actors involved in *Democratic Energy* attended *Green Net* events. People attended *Green Net* events to

network with each other, to market their businesses, and to learn about systemic and technical approaches to sustainability through formal presentations and informal dialogue. *Green Net* is similar in many ways to *High Road* in its form and structure. While many who attended *Green Net*'s events expressed their various political beliefs, the organization itself steered clear of naming any political intentions as *High Road* and *Democratic Energy* did. Most specifically, *Green Net* avoided any conversation about the limits of capitalism. In fact, its mission to help existing businesses develop a bigger market assumed an acceptance of existing economic systems. As a result, *GreenNet* leaned more towards hegemonic economic goals, even as it also emphasized systems views based on principles of ecology in their speaker line-up.

My data at this organization consists of fieldwork at monthly public presentations, monthly networking at a local brewery and a local conference center, and annual charrettes in which participants were asked to participate in a collective process of workshopping marketing and communication issues that green builders felt could be improved to promote the growth of their industry. At this organization, my participatory role was limited to casual conversations, and did not involve volunteering.


**Local Conferences, Fairs, Presentations & Local Media**

In order to capture a wide range of public actors, debates, and concepts regarding climate change, energy, sustainability and social justice, my data also includes a sampling of ethnographic fieldwork at local community conferences, fairs, presentations and panels that speak to climate change, green jobs, sustainability and the green economy. I also take into account local news sources and blogs as well as advertisements for clean energy

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products and services that are published in local papers and mass mailings. This sampling helped me to triangulate the data (Marshall and Rossman 1995); and to see connections between local actors and issues.

**Case Studies of an Emerging Green Public**

Each of these organizations emphasizes sustainability and justice in their mission statements. Their commitment to social justice, however, is articulated along slightly different lines – as multi-race, as multi-class, as pro-labor, or as vaguely inclusive of justice. People know what they bring into the climate change predicament – they are committed to labor equity, or they are entrepreneurial, or they are anti-racist – however, articulating a clear strategy that can move systems, societies and individuals to adapt to or mitigate climate change is still very much a work in progress.

It goes without saying that the organizations are each enabled and constrained by various factors, including funding, overhead, time, and leadership. For example, many who are involved in local just sustainability projects do so as an extension of their paid work. On the one hand, this allows actors to enact social change in and through the workplace; and on the other, it risks creating an inherently conservative politics in which it is harder to go beyond the ramifications of one's job description, and harder to be truly inclusive of community in terms of the representation of bodies or ideas.

While I look at these sites organizationally, and capture their different organizational approaches, my primary interest is to study the formulation of ideas and processes that arise out of the multiple interactions that occur in and through these organizations. Thus,

while the research questions frame the research in terms of a meta-analysis of an emerging green public, the data allows for intersecting themes and processes to become apparent at micro levels of social interaction within various settings of organizational activity. The research is not a comparison of separate case studies. The case studies serve as nodes of a larger framework: emerging green publics. The challenge of this research is to bridge back and forth between the macro and the micro frameworks without over-emphasizing the generalizability of the specific data (Marshall and Rossman 1995).

## Ethnographic Approach

The research engages in what Paul Lichterman calls field-driven participant observation (Lichterman 1998). Ethnography is particularly suited to my research questions since field research can document "social life as a process, as emergent meanings established in and through social interaction" (Emerson et al. 1995). I used the technique offered by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, in their book, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes,* to keep extensive field notes as well as analytic notes (Emerson et al. 1995). I coded these field notes using the software program, *Nvivo,* and analyzed my field notes through repetitive and reflective reading of both chronologically organized data and analytic notes, as well as data grouped by coded categories.

I conceptualize this ethnography of local activity in sustainability and justice as one that is less defined by the organizations I study than by a field of convergent, networked activity. This approach is based on what I found in the data. It is also corroborated by a number of scholars who conceptualize climate activism and counter globalization movements as networked, yet divergent; sharing resources and mobilizing collectively in

real and virtual time, yet existing as independent nodes. (North 2011; Castells 2010; Routledge 2006).[4]

The local organizations and events that I study are part of a highly networked field that consists of professionals, activists, and citizens who come together to learn, discuss, and strategize ways to mitigate and adapt to climate change; to transition to clean energy infrastructures; and to develop a green economy. The organizations can be said to serve as landing sites for people to seek out information, find solutions to their needs, or satisfy their curiosity. They are in a sense, gathering spaces for individual and group explorations of climate change, environmentalism, sustainability and justice. This is a moment of "incipience and coagulation" in which current, local organizational activity reflects the starting points for a transition from a fossil fuel economy to a clean energy economy (Page 2011).

Many of the individuals who worked in or with these organizations attended each others' meetings, knew each other as friends and colleagues, attended other meetings on climate change and clean energy simultaneously, and advertised each other's events through online list serves and announcements at public meetings. Roundtables organized by *HighRoad* were sometimes attended by the same people who attended GreenNet's monthly networking events. A few *GreenNet* regulars were also one-time presenters at *HighRoad*. Members of *Democratic Energy* were members of *HighRoad*'s list serve and came to present on clean energy, solar, and green jobs at *HighRoad* on more than one occasion. Both *High Road* and *Democratic Energy* members were primary organizers of a major local climate change conference in 2013; and *GreenNet* board members included

staff members and board members of *Democratic Energy*.

While I was studying two organizations in depth, I also regularly attended local climate change teach-ins, rallies, conferences and clean energy fairs, some of which were organized or co-organized by the organizations or organization participants in my ethnography. It quickly became clear that the organizations I was studying were highly networked with a range of local organizations and local activists as well as with local businesses who were exploring, rallying around, and working on sustainability, justice, clean energy, and alternative economic practices.   So, while the data I collected concentrates on specific interactions in the organizational activity of three local entities, the activity represented by the actors in the data exists in a network whose shape looks like radiating and interconnected circles of personal and professional connection and activity.

There were visible inner core members. At the individual level, there were local entrepreneurs, organizers, and activists who showed up at multiple and distinct local events. At the organizational level, there were highly active organizations who were able to garner the participation of a diverse set of actors including labor activists, entrepreneurs, alternative economy thinkers, and clean energy engineers. If I looked at the individuals, I could see them traveling through multiple organizational sites and activity. If I looked at the organizations, I could see them harnessing the activity of multiple local actors. These actors included concerned local citizens; the staff of concerned organizations or businesses (such as local municipal workers or energy efficiency crew workers) who harbored both a professional as well as a personal interest

in putting forward a just and sustainable agenda; and organizational representation, including local universities, regional employment boards, and construction companies.

**The Setting**

The Pioneer Valley is a region in western Massachusetts that loosely encompasses three counties: Hampshire, Hampden and Franklin, home to about 700,000 people. Part rural, it is dotted by small towns and cities close to the Connecticut River including Springfield (population 153,100); Chicopee (55,200); Westfield (41,000); Holyoke (39,000), Northampton (28,000), Amherst (37,800) and Greenfield (18,000) (U.S. Census).

The Pioneer Valley's main industries are education, health care, small scale defense, and tourism (Western MA EDC). The region is regarded as a leader in sustainable agriculture and clean energy.  Springfield is first in the state for solar capacity in cities with populations of more than 50,000 people. Holyoke is second only to Boston in its solar capacity, and boasts a municipally-owned hydroelectric company (Kinney 2012). The Pioneer Valley is home to one of the first community supported agriculture organizations; has seen a 50% growth in farmer's markets since 2007; and has more than doubled its community supported farms in that same time frame (CISA 2011). Through state incentives for maximizing energy efficiency and increasing renewable energy use in Massachusetts' towns and cities, seven municipalities in the Pioneer Valley have been designated "Green Communities;"[5] and at least fourteen more are in the process of obtaining green community status as of 2013 (PVPC Going Green).

While the area boasts some of the most vibrant university towns and progressive thinking

in the nation in terms of food security, community agriculture, and clean energy, it is also

a region that is rife with race and class inequalities. A recent University of Michigan

study on segregation found that Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin counties encompass a

region that is one of the most racially segregated in the country (NPR 05/21/2013), with

Springfield ranking as the second most segregated school system in the nation for Latino

students and the ninth most segregated for African American students (McArdle 2010).[6]

Regional segregation is also evident in the statistic that 87 percent of the black and 81

percent of the Latino populations in the Valley live in the cities of Holyoke and

Springfield (Taafe 2013). Poverty rates parallel this regional racial segregation with child

poverty rates totaling 42 percent in Springfield and 48.7 percent in Holyoke, nearly four

times the statewide rate of 12.8 percent (Taafe 2013).

Thus, while the area is a national leader in developing clean energy strategies and

implementing public programs that encourage sustainable consumption and energy

efficiency, its demographic politics in terms of equity and inclusion are some of the worst

in the nation.


**Local Activity in Context**

The parameters of the field I study are local in the sense that they are place-based

activities centered on municipal and regional communities in a relatively space-bound

geography.  However, the "geography" of this study pulses in and around a relatively

large terrain even though all three organizations that form the basis of the networked field

I am studying are based in the Pioneer Valley. For example, *High Road* drew from

statewide connections and often included presenters who worked in and traveled from the Berkshires, the Boston area and Worcester. *Democratic Energy* was headquartered in the Pioneer Valley, but it counted members throughout the state including some who organized clean energy projects in Providence, Rhode Island and in New York City. Council meetings, leadership meetings and conferences at *Democratic Energy* took place over a wide geographic area that included Brattleboro in Vermont, and Greenfield, Holyoke, Northampton, Amherst, Springfield, Worcester, Boston, and the South Shore in Massachusetts. Thus, while *Democratic Energy* promoted local ownership and local resilience, its activity was regionally based and drew from numerous resources that were based on individual participation, local interest, regional capacities, and state programs. One of the ironies was how much gas it took to be a staff member or board member of *Democratic Energy*. One *Democratic Energy* organizer said she had to quit her job because she was driving too much – from Boston to Vermont and Greenfield and back. Another staff member bemoaned the fact that he had never burned as much fossil fuel as he had while working at *Democratic Energy*. Lastly, *GreenNet* was perhaps the most geographically narrow in its scope, drawing its membership and participation mostly from the upper Pioneer Valley -- from Northampton to Greenfield.

It is important to emphasize that these local activities were integrally situated in state activity, national activity and transnational activism around the green economy, clean energy and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Local organizational activity and events networked with and represented national and international organizations such as 350.org, Jobs with Justice, the Apollo Alliance and the Sierra Club, as well as state-wide coalitions such as the MA Green Justice Coalition, whose leaders not only expressed

similar collective formulations of a just and sustainable future, but also came to the Pioneer Valley to offer their expertise and leadership at conferences, presentations and panels organized by local citizens and organizations.

National voices for sustainability helped to frame and focus local activity. Longtime environmental justice activist Carl Anthony; green jobs guru, Van Jones; climate change activist Bill McKibben and green jobs and urban greening leader, Majora Carter, each came to the Pioneer Valley (sometimes multiple times) from 2008 to 2013 to inspire local audiences to green their communities, to create green jobs programs, to pressure local colleges and institutions to divest from oil, and to underscore, with different examples and emphasis, the relationship between justice and sustainability.

**Insider/Outsider Research Positions**

Entry into the field has reflected a multifaceted interplay of insider and outside status for me. In a few ways, I was an insider. As an educated middle class white person, I was on the inside. Many of the people I interacted with were highly educated. They were all familiar with what it meant to do graduate work in sociology, and opened up their meeting space to include me as a researcher and to introduce me as such with ease. I felt relatively trusted as a researcher. People often asked me questions about how my research was going and they expressed interest in reading whatever work came from my research. While internally I often felt that the role of a researcher positioned me as an outsider, sometimes in ways that I found uncomfortable to navigate, making me feel like I was too much the observer, at arms length from the social activity I was studying; the people I was interacting with responded to me in ways that emphasized my participant role as one

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of them, even in my research capacity. At *Democratic Energy*, organizers included me in the work I was observing and asked me to contribute perspectives and meeting notes. For one annual meeting, I put together an analysis of some qualitative survey data that was distributed to members. At *High Road*, committee meetings, phone meetings and even board meetings were scheduled in such a way as to facilitate my ability to attend them, and my advice and observations were welcomed and even solicited, as in the case of an annual retreat at which I provided an overview of the organization's efforts from my perspective as a sociological researcher. One key informant at *Democratic Energy* introduced me to a new volunteer at a tabling event with the words: "this is Vanessa, she's our think tank."

I traveled in largely white spaces with the racial privilege that most whites take for granted. People were not afraid to look me in the eye or to introduce themselves to me and strike up a conversation. This was partially an effect of my racial identity and its reception by other whites who were used to traveling in white spaces in which the social habits are to treat other whites more often as individuals, in contrast to white orientations toward people of color that underscore race. I witnessed the way in which people of color became hyper-visible to whites in these settings, and I was privy to comments from fellow whites who highlighted the fact of the presence of people of color as members of a racial group. One member of *GreenNet* for example, after listening to a black man participate in a group discussion, told me: "At all the events I've been to, I've never seen one minority here," this, despite the fact that I had been at events with him with people of color present, and the fact that in that very room there were a handful of people of color present besides the speaker about whom he was referring.

I was also an insider by virtue of the fact that I was studying people and organizations in my geographic area and social network. In a small community – even one that straddles numerous towns and several cities, there are not very many degrees of separation between people, especially given the fact that I have lived in the geographic area of my research on and off for twenty years. A sizable number of people I encountered in my fieldwork were in my circle of community acquaintances. Some I knew personally, and some had friends who were also friends of mine. One of the founding members of *High Road* spent summers at an activist camp run by good friends of my partner's sister. Another *High Road* member was a fellow graduate student doing anthropology research on alternative economies. We met a few times to discuss our academic work as well as our different positions in and approaches to fieldwork. At one event, a neighbor of mine who had just completed a deep energy retrofit of her home came to share her homeowner perspective on energy efficiency. At another couple of events, a different neighbor was in charge of organizing panel presentations on climate change and militarism. I even ran into my mother-in-law at a couple of events. One of her close friends was a core member of *High Road* and another close friend of hers who I ran into at a sustainability summit facilitated by *Democratic Energy* had attended my ceremony of commitment years earlier. I regularly encountered people I knew: friends I had taken classes with; professors who taught at the college I was teaching at; acquaintances who were major activists in my hometown that I had been to parties with; and parents of students at my children's schools.

At the same time, I was also an outsider. I was frequently the only queer woman at events

and often felt like one of the youngest. The demographics of the spaces I travelled in were surprisingly old. Even events that took place at local colleges and universities drew an older crowd of which few people were in their twenties or thirties, let alone teens.

It surprised me how often I felt marginalized as a woman in the spaces in which I travelled. The community I live in is a particularly female space – known as a progressive environment for queer women and home to three women's undergraduate institutions (Bay Path University, Mount Holyoke College and Smith College). But many of the meetings and events drew from race and gender segregated areas of labor activism, construction work, and engineering. I found myself resenting men's lack of sensitivity around personal space and gendered physical relations. At one event, a male organizer I did not know stuck an organizational sticker on my chest as I was busy registering my name on a list. Other male organizers patronizingly bent down to greet me with awkward hugs when they entered meeting spaces in which I was already seated, assuming a closeness I did not feel with them.

While my insider status enabled me to obtain access and trust relatively easily and to move with relative ease through a range of public spaces and organizational meetings, my outsider status dampened my sense of connection with the social and identity aspects of emergent climate change movements. I bemoaned the limitations of the network demographics, and felt alienated in ways that made me pessimistic about what multicultural educators call the demographic sustainability of these local movements.

The data became a frustrating puzzle for me — especially in terms of the conflicting terrain of the difference between justice and sustainability discourse on the one hand, and

the limited demographics of meetings and gatherings on the other. In some ways, the fieldwork was super interesting. People used a language that evoked a sociological imagination. Numerous conversations and interactions revealed that many people understood the structures and social forces at issue, while being empowered to think of themselves as having agency in the face of the global, systemic problems presented by climate change and inequality. On the other hand, I felt stifled by how dreadfully dull and conservative the field felt at times. Meetings and conversations did not always represent the free flow of information and inspiration promised by the discourse of a just and sustainable future. Sometimes, meetings are just dull, no matter what the premise. However, I also attributed this dull edge to a tendency for meetings to attract an insider crowd of gender segregated bureaucrats and professionals: contractors and labor organizers, techies and managers.

"Another world is possible" did not always seem to be located here — especially along the lines of gender, race, and class. The "fortitude of popular struggle" that can "conjure up" the often invisibilized goals of justice and humanity (Prashad 2013) was undermined by the mostly white and often male middle class orientations and interests of these groups. And yet I stayed committed to the fieldwork, because what was not yet seen, was still there somehow; and because I knew something needed to be said too, about the way that privilege structures networks in contestation with justice and democracy.

**Guiding Notions**

A few quotes guided my methodological process in terms of approach to the data and to the story I chose to tell. One was a statement made by Carl Anthony at a sustainability

conference organized by *Democratic Energy*. He remarked: "social scientists help us measure how effectively we are changing." While relatively straightforward, and probably obvious to most established social scientists, this succinct statement gave me permission to see my research as a potential tool for clarifying what is happening on the ground — to movement actors. While terrifying in some ways, in terms of what this suggests about my own accountability as a researcher to social processes that I am studying; Anthony's insight helped me understand what my purpose could be. It motivated me through a particularly difficult research process by offering a larger framework of meaningful purpose as I tried to untangle complex and disperse data, and say something coherent, when at times, the process felt entirely incoherent and pointless.

Another statement that helped me focus my approach to the data was one made by Australian geographer, Kathy Gibson, in response to a student's paper at a community economy working group I had the privilege of attending in August of 2012. She urged the author of the paper we collectively read to "open up difficult things in an interesting way rather than staying with romantic rhetoric on the one hand or cultural critique on the other." I wrote out this quote from my notes and taped it on my wall as a reminder to break out of exactly that dichotomy that I found myself trapped in as a social justice oriented scholar. On the one hand, I was drawn to the romantic discourse of sustainability and justice; on the other I was tearing it down. Gibson's statement helped me explode that polarity. She also offered another nugget at that community scholar meeting: "Which stories do we want to tell?," she asked us. And she elaborated that we have an ethical choice as researchers of being true to reality, which is everything, or making an intervention. She encouraged all of us who were sitting there to ask the question "what

can we bring to the situation that may or may not improve the situation?" This research approach resonated with me, and freed me to navigate the challenging qualitative project of making choices about what to document, and to what end. It helped to think about telling a story about what people were trying to do and where there might be openings to move the project of sustainability and justice forward. This stance helped me to see my role as a researcher and a scholar as one who, through writing could document and critique (which I had learned how to do so well over the course of my educational career), *and* be a participant by attempting to articulate an analysis that could be productive and participatory. It gave me a way to try to steer clear of the academic pitfall of being distant and objectifying, and it helped me focus my analytic choices.

Lastly, I was inspired by the qualitative approach of Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St.Pierre whose stance is that a post-structuralist approach to research and writing allows writing to be "validated as a method of knowing" (Richardson and St.Pierre 2008). While I did not employ their method of "creative analytical process"[7] to the letter, their approach informed my writing process. It allowed me to be conscious of the way in which writing itself is a method for understanding and knowing the data. Their approach helped me avoid flattening the data when I coded it for themes such as "sustainability," "justice," "race," or "point of entry." It helped me work with the data at a deeper level so that while Nvivo helped me find one level of order to the conversations and interactions that I documented, Richardson and St.Pierre's approach affirmed that I could use writing to find my way to knowledge — that knowledge was not just merely sitting there waiting for Nvivo and I to comb through it and list it out.

The links between the data I collected and the questions I had about politics and agency were quite a challenge. I had to continually work back and forth between the macro context, the micro data, and the findings to understand facts and processes that were, at times, a mess of disparate conversations. Each of these approaches - ethnographic note-taking; ethnographic memos; categorizing themes in Nvivo; thinking about which interventions I could make that would be useful; and allowing myself to write it out without always being wedded to pure method — helped me sort my way through a thick and tangled morass of data, and to untangle it to say something that I hope, in the final analysis, is meaningful and makes a worthwhile contribution.

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[1] It is important to note that the political orientation of participants in sustainability movements runs the political gamut and includes those who wear the stripes of environmental socialism, human ecology, participatory democracy, libertarianism, pro-nativist and Nazi environmentalism, and survivalist militias. Some political pitfalls of advocating for the urgency of global environmental change include conservation programs that villainize indigenous people as environmental exploiters (Checker 2008; Goldman 2001); anti-immigration stances (Park and Pellow 2011;Wall 2006; Zimmerman 2004); green racism (Park and Pellow 2011); green nationalism (Stevis 2009); and a moralizing discourse that has colonialist impulses (Guthman 2008a), and creates new hierarchies with eco-deviants as targets of disdain (Rohloff 2011). Political theorist, Karena Shaw, advocates "reframing climate change as an energy systems – rather than an emissions reduction – problem" in order to reveal how central politics is to its mitigation. (Shaw 2011).

[2] Glenn Beck is a conservative talk show host who was employed at Fox News during this period. He highlighted disparaging remarks Jones had made against Republicans; sensationalized Jones' support of political prisoner, Mumia Abu Jamal; and characterized Jones' as "an unrepentant Communist revolutionary" in what many have called a smear campaign intended to bring Jones down. Beck's campaign was successful in this regard; Jones resigned from his position on September 5, 2009, after having started in the newly created position in March 2009.

[3] The names of these organizations are all pseudonyms.

[4] Peter North describes climate based movements in the U.K. as "composed of diverse 'convergence spaces' within which organizations, networks, and activists act independently, coalesce, act together, then disperse again. . ." (North 2011). Manuel Castells refers to the "network society" to highlight the increasingly networked nature of social movements, especially with the use of the internet as a communication and networking tool (Castells 2010). Paul Routledge uses the concept of convergent spaces to understand and critique global social movements. He describes convergence spaces as "diverse social movements that articulate collective visions. . . [that] are representative of a prefigurative politics, prefiguring not a future ideal society, but a participatory way of practicing effective politics." Routledge describes movements defined by convergence spaces as enacting "a practical politics consisting of at least five processes:

communication, information sharing, solidarity, coordination, and resource mobilization" (Routledge, 2006, 345).

[5] Belchertown, Easthampton, Hatfield, Holyoke, Northampton, Palmer and Springfield.

[6] Springfield is 51.8% white, 22.3% African-American, and 38.8% Latino (Mass Greens 2012) and Holyoke is 48%, Latino and 47% white (US Census) while many other towns in the Valley are more than 80% white: Northampton 84%, Amherst 78.9%, Greenfield 89.8%, Westfield 88.4, Chicopee 79.5% and West Springfield 82.1%. Many smaller towns that dot the Valley are more than 90 percent white (U.S Census).

[7] Richardson and St. Pierre write that creative analytical practices "recognize that there are far more than three sides by which to approach the world. We do not triangulate; we crystallize." They offer that there are four main criteria for evaluating cap ethnographies — criteria that I found useful in guiding my work:

"1. Substantive contribution: does the piece contribute to our understanding of social life?" . . .
2. Aesthetic Merit: . . . Does . . . the text . . . invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?
3. Reflexivity: How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness? . . .
4. Impact: Does the piece affect me emotionally or intellectually? Does it move me to try new research practices or move me to action?" (Richardson and St.Pierre in Denzin 2008: p.480)

# CHAPTER 3
# ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABILITY:
# DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORKS DRIVING LOCAL MOVEMENTS

## **Introduction**

Two different, yet overlapping discourses: *environmental justice* and *sustainable development* inform the starting points, assumptions and orientations of people organizing in response to climate change on both a national as well as local level in the United States. Many organizations as well as individual leaders in green economy organizing and climate change activism draw from the languages of environmental justice and sustainability to frame an analysis and direction for their work on a national as well as local basis. The discursive framework created by the intersections between sustainability and justice reverberated throughout the local communities I observed, inspiring approaches in the work of policy advocates, labor and community organizers, regional employment boards, community colleges, and entrepreneurs.

This chapter serves to contextualize local activity I researched in this ethnography by 1. outlining the origins of *sustainability* and *environmental justice* and 2. showing how these distinct but overlapping concepts are present in a range of ideas and frameworks in the local activity I studied in this ethnography. First, I turn to the history and literatures on sustainable development and environmental justice. Next, I show how environmental justice and sustainable development approaches overlap; how they shape other discursive contexts, and how they are embedded in emerging green economic frameworks. Lastly, I argue that the legacies of these two major strands of environmental theory and activism – sustainable development and environmental justice — reflect discursive tensions and tendencies that I observe in this ethnography.

**Sustainable Development: Background and Overview**

Gro Harlem Brundtland, then Prime Minister of Norway, chaired the United Nations

World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 (also known as the

Brundtland Commission), and spearheaded a conception of sustainable development that

is now seen as the foundation of global understandings of sustainability. This report,

"Our Common Future," famously defined sustainability as "development that meets the

needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their

own needs" (Brundtland Commission 1987).

As a term, sustainability, is often used interchangeably with sustainable development. It

can be said to encompass the main ideas and politics embedded in the sustainable

development approach. At the same time, the word sustainability has also taken a life of

its own beyond the context of international development. Thus, while it is driven by

sustainable development goals, meanings, and strategies, not everyone who uses the term

is familiar with, let alone referencing, international development approaches.

Sustainability is a major framework that shapes the landscape of economic and political

organizing in the face of climate change. On one level, "sustainability" is a concept that

is employed in different contexts to mean something like "good balance" in process and

outcome over time. Using the word "sustainability" signals a commitment to creating or

maintaining balance, or redressing a longstanding political, social or environmental

imbalance. In the area of climate change, sustainability is used prolifically to signal an

intention to create better, more balanced systems; and to signal a commitment to environmental amelioration. It is, in many ways, an overused term that comes to mean everything and nothing at all. Yet, like any concept, it has a history that is deeper than its apparently easy, superficial usage. It is useful to understand that genealogy in order to situate the discourse and frameworks of the local organizing that constitutes this ethnography.

The formulation of sustainability came out of a historical and cultural context in which environmental movements in the United States and Europe, as well as prominent individuals who were scholars and activists (like Rachel Carson and Ernest Schumaker)[1] increasingly called into question the ecological limits of the planet in the face of human industry and consumption. The concept gained legitimacy and usage through the field of international development work, especially that driven by the United Nations and its partners.

Several key moments marked the birth of "sustainability" and its beginnings as a prominent discursive framework. In 1972, the U.N. Conference on Human Environment took place in Stockholm, Sweden. This conference set the stage for recognizing "environmental management" as an essential aspect of development planning. A little more than a decade later, the UN World Commission on Environment and Development came out with the Brundtland report which oriented the concept of sustainable development around international goal setting and global future planning, especially in the realm of economic viability and social well-being. The Brundlandt Report took into account the growing concerns of environmentalists to articulate a perspective that though

it had been emerging for some time, and though it echoed indigenous thinking that had existed for millennia around the globe (Mebratu 1998), changed geopolitical discourse regarding the relationship between the economy, people, and the environment.

The report tried to hold two things that were at odds in a tough balance: the need to acknowledge the environmental limits of the planet in the face of human consumption and waste; and the need to improve the economic conditions of people's lives — often understood as the right to develop initiatives that could generate economic, and therefore social, well-being. Central to the concept of sustainability the report highlighted was the idea that poor and rich countries needed to work together to improve the way that development was impinging on the environment; and to promote the development of the economy without compromising the globe's environmental resources for future generations. The Brundtland report defined sustainability in such a way that promulgated an inherently European and American geopolitical perspective which assumes growth capitalism to be synonymous with development. Though groundbreaking in its efforts to frame the environment for global leaders and nation-states as intimately connected with development; and reaching for a common future across the globe, the report's main focus on economic development and viability compromises its attempt to integrate social and environmental goals in global economic planning. The Brundtland framework has also come under fire for not being specific enough about what kinds of policies and programs might work (Alkon 2009).

Nonetheless, this framework of sustainable development resonated widely. Now more popularly understood by its synonym, sustainability, it is still used prolifically as a major

framework that shapes organizational, activist, and community visions and programs for change that seek to balance economic, social and environmental imperatives.

At issue is a fundamental tension between: 1. economic growth and the resource strains this creates through consumption and waste; 2. the creation of jobs which stem from economic growth, reduce unemployment, and enable people to provide for their families; and 3. the ecological limits of the planet (Daly 1997; Jackson 2009). The following famous venn diagram developed by economist Edward Barbier in the 1980s, depicts the relationship between different kinds of sustainability: economic, social and environmental.
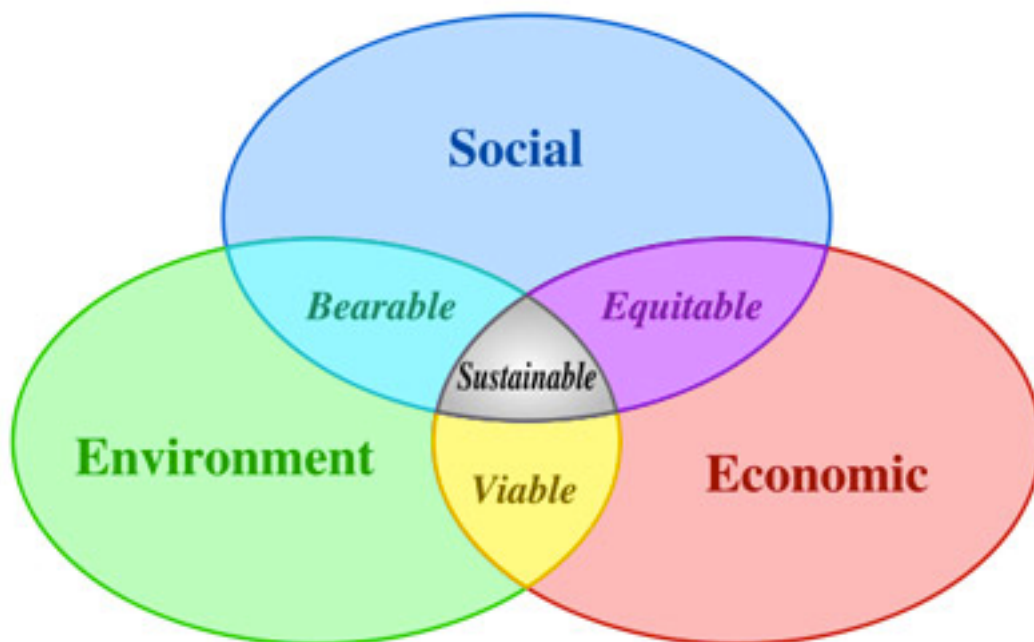


This diagram provides a neatly organized visual that outlines the three main legs of sustainability: economic sustainability, social sustainability, and environmental sustainability. The place where all of these intersect is the ideal state of an integrated sustainability. This is where sustainability is defined as the perfect balance between an

economic system that is viable for both people and the planet; an environment that is livable for people and the planet; and a social system that is equitable and fair. If one looks closely, this sustainability diagram also interpolates the tensions between economic viability, social equity and environmental well-being (in this diagram described as bearable).

While this diagram emphasizes all three legs as important in creating the balance we think of as the ideal sustainability, the way sustainability is generally used in global economic and political contexts tends to favor an economic sustainability that only takes environmental sustainability into account to a point. In addition, sustainability often implies only a vague notion of what social sustainability really means.

The legacy of the Brundtland definition of sustainability works to shape discourses on the global economy that center the importance of economic development – emphasizing smart growth, the right to development, and the importance of producing, distributing, and consuming green energy products and services as strategies for implementing sustainable practices. In practice then, the interconnected exigencies of economic sustainability, environmental sustainability and social sustainability have tended to favor economic sustainability over both environmental and social sustainability; and some would argue that "the illusion of negotiation and compliance ensures that the existing distribution of power within the global system is neither confronted nor challenged" (Redclift 2002).

Written at the height of Reagonomics and Thatcherism, and a resurgent political commitment to free-market economics, the report can thus also be read as an attempt to reconcile the runaway machine of global capitalism with the realist, and increasingly alarmist, calls of environmentalism. Another way to characterize the sustainability paradigm is also in its structure. It is inherently a top-down approach, produced and circulated in global halls of power. Sustainable development is the voice of diplomacy; of limited political pressure from elite spokespeople onto global leaders that does not fundamentally challenge capitalist paradigms.

The neoliberal economic development bias of sustainable development practices has not gone unchallenged, however. Some scholars have pointed out that sustainable development projects have served as a mantle for what might be more aptly called "green neoliberalism" in which foreign investors legitimized by the World Bank build energy projects that blame local people for environmental damage and marginalize subsistence living, such as occurred in the Mekong Delta in the building of hydroelectric dams (Goldman 2001). Others caution against the practice of "greenwashing" in which corporations market an image in which they appear to be more socially and environmentally responsible than they are (Cherry and Sneirson 2012). Still others, such as Herman Daly, former senior economist in the environmental department at World Bank, have sharply criticized the neoclassical economic assumptions embedded in sustainable development approaches, arguing that global economics is fundamentally an offshoot of planetary ecology, and that sustainable development will not be possible without centering the problem of the limits of growth (Daly 1997; Daly & Cobb 1989; Jackson 2009).

## Environmental Justice: Background and Overview

In 1982, protests over a PCB landfill in Warren County, North Carolina put environmental justice on the map. The high profile nature of this protest resulted in several national public policy studies that revealed overwhelming evidence for the racially disproportionate siting of landfills and toxic waste dumps (Mascarenhas 2009). In a 1983 study of eight southern states,[2] The US General Accounting Office found that three out of four commercial hazardous waste sites were located n predominantly African American neighborhoods, while African Americans made up only 20% of the population in this region (Bullard and Johnson 2000). In response to growing grassroots activism, the United Church of Christ Commission on Racial Justice produced another significant report in 1987. This study, *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, found race to be *the* most significant factor in predicting the location of toxic waste facilities, "more powerful than poverty, land values, and home ownership" (Bullard and Johnson 2000).

The environmental justice framework gained currency in the 1980s, during the same period that sustainability surfaced as a major global framework. Environmental justice arose initially as a movement that sought to redress vast race and class inequities in toxic dump sites and neighborhood health (Bullard et. al. 2008; Carruthers 2007). As I explain in this section, environmental justice has some key theoretical overlap with sustainability approaches, though it differs substantially in terms of the political context in which it arose, in terms of its political allegiances, and in terms of its implementation strategies.

The environmental justice movement grew out of the Civil Rights Movement, focusing on civil rights injustices as they played out in terms of the toxicity of working conditions

for employees, and particularly in terms of the impact of pollution and waste dumps on neighborhood residents (Bullard and Johnson 2000). It is a movement for environmental awareness in which social justice is central to defining environmental problems as well as solutions. As such, environmental justice is not only a movement, it is a framework — a significant and influential framework, that highlights the way that the social —  social justice, social life, and social resilience — is integral to the environment, to environmental problems, and to workable, livable solutions.

As the movement progressed, it continued to underscore many environmental inequities that demanded political attention. These included issues of health disparities, such as asthma caused by waste dumps and coal plant sitings; worker safety in dangerous jobs; and inequities in land use, housing and transportation (Bullard and Johnson 2000).

At its core, environmental justice provides a framework that does not separate people and neighborhoods from the notion of the environment and environmental health. The environment is the place "where we live, where we work, and where we play" (Agyeman 2008). While this integrative approach has greatly influenced contemporary mainstream environmental frameworks (more on that below), it still exists in contrast to a prevailing binary idea that there are cities and towns where people live, and then there is the "environment" — that elusive place where nature lives, and where polar bears must be saved (Jones 2008). Likewise, this framework of people and place *as* environment exists in contrast to the mainstream idea that places of "wilderness" exist separate from people, an idea that also marginalizes native people's sovereignty, rights and relationship to the land (Jones 2008; Smith 2005).

The movement does more than emphasize that the environment is where people live. It does more than document vast injustices in living and working in proximity to pollution. It is also a grassroots movement in which people are advocating for their fundamental right to participate fully —democratically —in municipal and corporate decisions that affect everyone's health and well-being. Environmental justice emphasizes procedural justice, in terms of ensuring equity in policy making. As such, environmental justice is not only about advocating for social justice in terms of race and class outcomes — it also for participatory justice in terms of public and private decision-making at every level, "including needs assessment, planning, implementation , enforcement, and evaluation" (First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit 1991).

Thus, environmental justice can be described by its form and stance towards power. It emphasizes grassroots organizing and demands an alignment of democratic values with democratic processes. Environmental justice activists and scholars put race and class front and center in their analyses of environmental inequality, emphasizing equal protection and equal participation: the rights of people to live in non-toxic environments; and the rights of communities to participatory decision-making in environmental policy and the siting of corporate waste (Bullard et al 2008). Environmental justice voices the concerns of people, neighborhoods, communities; speaking truth to power. As Bullard and Johnson write, environmental justice is not about the relatively politically flat questions of risk assessment and risk management. It is about "developing tools and strategies to eliminate unfair, unjust, and inequitable conditions and decisions" (Bullard and Johnson 2000).

For this reason perhaps, environmental justice is seen as being most successful at the local community level (Mascarenhas 2009). This does not mean that the environmental justice movement has not won some key policy victories at the state and federal levels. It has. Most notably, in 1994, President Clinton issued an Executive Order which charged all federal agencies to integrate environmental justice into their institutional agendas. And currently, most states have environmental justice statutes that create a certain amount of state accountability for communities to rely on.  It is community struggle and grassroots organizing, however, that has arguably made the most impact in terms of forcing toxic industries to close and preventing new expansions and developments (Mascarenhas 2009).

As a result, some have critiqued the environmental justice model as being "too empirical," focusing narrowly on local case studies at the expense of engaging theoretically in the discipline of sociology (Holifield 2009), and at the expense of linking "local struggles to national and global ones" (Di Chiro 1998,116). Others have accused environmental justice movements of focusing too narrowly on distributive justice without taking capitalism to task, though environmental justice authors themselves have documented how activists are consciously strategic about the ways that they invoke race or class to different audiences or constituents with whom they are engaged (Checker 2008). It is unclear whether this "narrowness" is a function of environmental justice studies themselves, the exigencies of activism, or a function of the reception of EJ in a global economic and political system whose commitments are antithetical to the principles and goals of EJ. At least implicitly, environmental justice frameworks

challenge the effects of capitalism and its processes, and EJ has profoundly shaped global frameworks for environmental organizing and environmental awareness.

In the next section, I take a look at the way that both the environmental justice and sustainability frameworks overlap and cross-pollinate to shape other discursive frameworks that relate to the environment and/or to the economy such as environmentalism, climate change, and the green economy.

**Sustainability and Environmental Justice: Discursive Overlap and Influence**

In the contemporary landscape of global environmental advocacy and concern, these two discursive strands: *environmental justice* and *sustainable development* permeate the ways that activists, policy makers, entrepreneurs, and organizations think about and act upon climate change, global sustainability, and the green economy, while also cross-pollinating to continue to shape ideas about the relationship between economic, environmental and social sustainability and justice.[3]

While environmental justice and sustainability continue to develop in their original contexts, they also show up as frameworks in arenas that are distinct from their institutional origins in grassroots organizing and development work. The concept of sustainability, for example, has been incorporated into environmental discourse such that environmentalism is often expressed in terms of environmental sustainability. Sustainability discourses are also present in the organizing language of high profile climate change activists such as former president of Ireland, Mary Robinson;[4] and NASA scientist James Hansen. They use the newer phrase "intergenerational justice" to conceptualize a just and sustainable future, while also emphasizing the centrality of

human rights to climate justice (Robinson 2013).

The environmental justice framework has made the most impact in terms of underscoring the significance of social justice to environmental work. In an article about the changing social construction of environmental discourses,Taylor observes that:

> "The environmental justice discourse has also transformed the way mainstream environmentalists think about the environment and also the way many people of color think about and relate to the environment. Because of environmental justice, it is no longer considered appropriate for mainstream environmentalists to define and analyze environmental issues without considering the social justice implications of the problem" (Taylor 2000, 523).

One manifestation of the legacy of the environmental justice movement is the incorporation of environmental justice analyses and language into specific environmental movements that relate to resource distribution, consumption, and policy making such as *food justice*,[5] *energy justice*[6] and *climate justice*.[7] The environmental justice framework is integral to grassroots efforts to organize community projects that empower people to take ownership over the production and distribution of food and energy sources.

Though it began as a movement specific to the United States, the EJ movement has also informed global movements for environmentalism using the language of equitable outcomes, equitable access, and participatory decision-making (Carruthers 2007; Martinez-Alier 2002; Martinez-Alier 2003). Scholars and activists advocate that environmental justice is a lynchpin framework that can disrupt the ways that global policies and initiatives pit economic justice and environmental sustainability against each other by separating the issue of creating jobs from the issue of ensuring healthy environments. Because environmental justice makes social justice central to the twin imperatives of economic and environmental health, it can provide a road map for poverty

reduction that goes hand in hand with environmental stewardship and protection (Martinez-Alier 2002). Proponents argue that the environmental justice framework can promote active forms of citizen participation (Faber & McCarthy 2003) that ensure global prosperity for all without unsustainable growth (Jackson 2009).

In current formulations of the green economy, green jobs, and climate change, sustainability and justice are often articulated in tandem, as if these two very different strands have always belonged together. "Sustainability and justice" is a catch-all phrase that I heard over and over again in my fieldwork. Often, this combination is formulated in ways that invisibilize their historical and institutional contexts as well as their underlying tensions. Sometimes, activists try to bring these frameworks together in a strategic effort to emphasize the most proactive parts of these legacies. For example, environmental justice scholar-activist Robert Bullard and sociologist Julian Ageyman seek to bring together these discursive legacies in a new paradigm they call *just sustainability* in which they emphasize four main domains: quality of life, present and future generations, justice/equity, and living within ecological limits. "At its heart," Agyeman writes, "is a fundamental acknowledgment of social injustice as the root of our current un-sustainability"[8] (Ageyman 2005).

**Environmental Justice and Sustainability Strands in the Green Economy:**
**Tensions Between Sustainability and Justice and Green Capitalism**

Strands of environmental justice and sustainability discourses come together to shape advocacy for a green economy; for the creation of green jobs through energy efficiency measures; and for the development of renewable energy products and services. While myriad scholars, activists,[9] and organizations use frameworks that underscore the

interplay, indeed the necessity of seeing sustainability and justice as connected, Van Jones' approach has been particularly popular — both nationally and among the communities I observed in this ethnography. Jones linked the discourses of sustainability and justice in a highly visible national campaign. He was a central figure, along with advocacy organizations such as *The Apollo Alliance*, *The Center on Wisconsin Strategy* (COWS), and *Green for All*, in working with legislators to create and pass the Green Jobs Act of 2007.

This act authorized $125 million in funds for clean energy job training. The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 also earmarked significant funds for clean energy economic development, including $150 million in "pathways out of poverty" funding for job training intended to benefit low-income workers and disadvantaged youth of color (Harper-Anderson 2012). Jones also consulted with communities around the country to help design programs that could take advantage of this act to train disadvantaged youth in solar installation and retrofitting skills. In addition, he drew large crowds around the country for charismatic talks in which he articulated a vision for a green economy that could address both climate change as well as social inequity. While Van Jones receded from the spotlight after he was forced to resign from his newly minted position in Obama's first administration, his influence on the discourse did not wane. His name was often mentioned at meetings I attended (even towards the end of my data collection in 2013) as a major influence on people's perspectives and involvement in both sustainability and justice work.

Many local and national conversations about climate change, sustainability, and a bad economy (especially in the years 2008-2010) took inspiration from what Van Jones was saying in his national activism work, as well as in his published book, *The Green Collar Economy: How One Solution Can Fix Our Two Biggest Problems* (2008). In this book, Jones outlines the case for a "Green New Deal" that involves transforming a waste-based society into a society that saves the environment as well as people, rooting his analysis in an environmental justice framework that interrupts the traditional environmentalist dichotomy between nature and society.  Highlighting the nations' increasing landscape of economic inequality, Jones centers class and race in his argument, noting the exclusion of poor people and people of color from mainstream environmental movements, as well as the ongoing racial disparities in health and wealth to advocate for a "cross-race, cross-class partnership" that could benefit everyone. Jones proposes building a green economy that is "strong enough to lift people out of poverty" by creating opportunities to participate in the production and distribution of green products and services that are not just accessible to the "eco-elite." Jones advocates for a new green economy that is by definition, an economy that produces "eco-equity" in which everyone has a financial stake and participates and benefits equally (Jones 2008).

Jones recognizes that this process is not in and of itself an anti-capitalist agenda. His aim is to make alliances that will favor democratic forces more than authoritarian ones; justice more than injustice (Miripuri et al 2009). While firmly grounded in the principles of environmental justice, Jones' political strategy focuses on making an impact on existing economic and political infrastructure, rather than questioning the viability of that structure. This approach explains its appeal at the same time as it reveals a significant

vulnerability around being able to successfully structure accountability to the very environmental and social justice goals it sets out, let alone address the powerful interests for whom pollution and exploitation is so profitable.

The green economy is a concept that rallies around the urgency of addressing the rising impact of climate change, by integrating imperatives of social and environmental justice. As such, it represents a paradigmatic shift away from capitalism as usual. However, its wide appeal also reflects an ongoing allegiance to capitalism, and especially to the idea that a greener capitalism is possible. Indeed, some wonder whether the green economy is just a new word for sustainable development (Halle 2011). On the one hand, the fact that both just sustainability activists and green economy capitalists "share the assumption that the creation of efficient green energy industries and products is the key to addressing environmental degradation and inequality" (Alkon 2012), is heartening for its common ground. However, this focus on the economy as a key site of change reinscribes the logic of the market as the driving force of social and environmental change, setting the stage for a dependency on capitalism that has theoretically and historically proven to exacerbate inequity (Tucker 1978; Marable 1983; Foster & Magdoff 2009) as well as relentless environmental destruction.

At its outset, the concept of "green economy" also went hand in hand with the concept of "green jobs," which also incorporated both sustainable development and social justice strands in its various uses and definitions. Green jobs was first expressed as "green collar jobs" signaling blue collar jobs in green businesses "whose products and services directly improve environmental quality" (Pinderhughes 2006; Pinderhughes 2007; Jones 2008).

Because of the emphasis on blue collar jobs, green jobs often came to mean construction jobs in clean energy industry, signaling especially the solar and wind industries (Good Jobs First 2009; White and Walsh 2008). Green jobs is also used to mean "good green jobs"" – jobs that provide a living wage and are family supporting (Jones 2008; Good Jobs First; Pinderhughes 2007; White 2009). Similarly, green jobs are sometimes defined as "green union jobs" that protect workers' bargaining rights (Good Jobs First 2009; Goffman 2009; Renner et al 2008). In general terms, green jobs are used to signal any job that has to do with environmentally friendly products and services from extraction through production and distribution. For example, the Bureau of Labor Statistics defines green jobs as jobs that "help protect or restore the environment or conserve natural resources" (Harper-Anderson 2012), a definition which emphasizes broad sustainability practices, while marginalizing justice and equity. Despite a mainstream understanding of green jobs as environmentally sustainable, the inclusion and equity goals of environmental justice advocates and green job activists like Jones and Pinderhughes has made significant inroads. In my fieldwork for example, local communities take on this contestation work to define green jobs in equitable terms as good union jobs that protect workers' rights to organize.

The reluctance to take capitalism to task as a central problem leaves green economy frameworks vulnerable to program failures, especially in the areas of addressing inequality, as Jones and his colleagues tried to do when they paired climate change exigencies with unemployment and poverty issues. This is evident in recent studies that show a persistence of inequity in green economic initiatives. Growth in the clean energy sector has been saddled with failure, the stresses of a persistent economic recession, and a

sequence of federal and state budget cuts (Gupta 2012; Stephens & Leonnig 2011). Green job initiatives show disturbing trends of racial disparity, whereby low-income communities of color, especially African Americans, have benefited less from "pathways out of poverty" grants than whites, and are not receiving a proportional share of green economy opportunities (Harper-Anderson 2012). Lack of accountability structures and an emphasis on free-market capitalism that favors venture capitalists at the expense of workers and communities constitute additional problems (Harper-Anderson 2012; Arun 2012).

Also problematic are the inherent undemocratic tendencies of a green economy that separates issues of environmentalism and justice; that puts a higher premium on environmentalism than justice; and that relies on wealthy consumers who can afford to buy expensive green products to influence the direction the green economy takes (Alkon 2009). Rural studies scholar Wendy Milne shows how the energy sector in particular has been male dominated. She emphasizes the importance of advocating for gender justice as society shifts towards conservation and renewable energy sources (Milne 2004). Other authors have shown how a significant sector of the green economy, alternative food markets, is shaped by white cultural practices (Alkon and McKullen 2011; Slocum 2007) and coded as white space to affect a universalist presumption of normativity that is deeply racialized and rife with colorblind assumptions (Guthman 2008a). "The green economy" then, is a contradictory site of social activity and meaning-making that straddles capitalism as usual, and a paradigmatic shift towards systemic thinking that centers social justice. Addressing this contradiction means addressing the unsustainable

nature of capitalism itself, something that many on the national and political stage are reluctant to do (Klein 2014).

The way that these two major discourses, environmental justice and sustainability, circulate in national and local activity exacerbates a tension between economic viability and social justice. Sustainability is a discourse that resonates more with hegemonic ways of solving problems, and environmental justice is a discourse that resonates more with subaltern solutions to political problems. The presence of both of these significant discursive approaches in contemporary environmental work structures a reverberating tension between capitalism and profitability on the one hand, and people and the planet on the other.

**Discursive Echoes in the Field:**
**Sustainable Capitalism, Alternative Economies, Social Justice and Systemic Transformation**

While the subjects of conversation in this ethnography ran the gamut from insulation techniques and state programming, to corporate accountability and the latest clean energy technology, the discursive orientations embedded in these conversations echoed the discourses of environmental justice and sustainability outlined above. It was clear, as I mentioned in chapter 2, that national voices for sustainability helped to frame and focus local activity.

At a sustainability conference organized by *Democratic Energy* in 2008 for example, nationally renowned EJ scholar and activist, Carl Anthony, framed the discourse of sustainability for the audience:

"This notion of sustainability has done some wonderful things. It will make an important contribution to the next struggle for justice. We have to get on a different footing – that footing is the intersection between the ideas of sustainability and justice" (Field Notes, June 2008).

I will show how sustainability and justice discourses shaped local activity in this ethnography in more detail in chapter 4. In the following section, I will give a brief overview of what I see as some other key discourses that are central to unpacking the social dynamics of current climate change organizing. On the one hand, I am underscoring the way that discursive frameworks of sustainability and justice constitute the main orientation of local activity in response to climate change. On the other hand, the thrust of sustainability and justice work surfaced within other frameworks, and they were shaped in turn, by other discursive orientations. This was evident in the case of the green economy that I elaborated above. And it was evident in the discourses I outline next: sustainable capitalism, alternative economies, social justice, and systemic transformation.

Discourse can be slippery business, especially when new opportunities and potentials are at stake, and so it was no surprise to be sitting at tables where participants lauded technological salvation and clean energy profitability, while also admonishing each other to "get real" about the green economy, citing the difference between working collaboratively and working with entrepreneurs who too readily put up a sign for a new green industrial park (Field Notes July 23, 2008). The presence of competing and central discourses (central to people's orientations and to the points they wanted to make) made it seem, at times, that I was listening to multiple conversations at once. At other times, I wondered whether there were different conversations going on at all — that maybe my

data was showing me one extended conversation marked by collective confusion about how to change the environmental, social, and economic mess we find ourselves in, all brought to a head by the reality of climate change.

**Sustainable Capitalism**

Capitalism, as a result of its stronghold over global systems, and especially the consciousness of the American public, constitutes the predominant political and economic discourse — one that gets re-centered and re-appropriated even as it is being questioned. Capitalism showed up as a predominant discourse, both in terms of unapologetic allegiance to market-based logic as well as discursive versions that included nods towards alternative economics as a tool to survive in the marketplace. Respondents talked about the necessity to generate a profit; and "the opportunity for investments in building efficiency" that can solve multiple problems including climate change, unemployment, a bad economy, a collapsing middle class, and high debt (Field Notes February 25, 2012). While capitalist logic was woven into conversations, people also talked about being in a class war and "creating the social force that flips the economy from competitive to cooperative so it's not about businesses — it's about people" (Field Notes, Nov. 30, 2011). Discursive approaches in general ranged between a solid critique of capitalism on the one hand, and a strategic skirting of the problems of systemic capitalism on the other, while also articulating pride in profitability or the potential for economic growth in green industry. This mirrored the tensions that exist between sustainability and environmental justice.

Most prominent in this data is a form of capitalist discourse that incorporates notions of sustainability. This is the discourse of sustainable capitalism or "green capitalism" which weaves a narrative that articulates that capitalism may have wreaked some havoc, but we can be better businessmen and women, and hope for a good profit margin too. A discourse of green, or sustainable capitalism views dirty energy as having created more harm than capitalism per se.

Sustainable capitalism is a discourse in which people are regarded as generally good, and in which the language of class and power interests is sidelined for a language in which a green economy offers new and exciting opportunities to make profit, create jobs, and save the world from fossil fuels at the same time. It is also a discourse that puts a lot of faith in the potential of technological development to save the future. This discourse doesn't spend much time pondering the sticky questions of consumption, labor, racism, or human rights. It is mired in the neoliberal tendrils of market based logic, though in this climate change form, it may tend toward more regulatory schemes, especially as concerns environmental accountability. This is the discourse that pervades Al Gore's approach made famous by his film *An Inconvenient Truth* in which the message is that addressing climate change is paramount, but in which the message does not include a fundamental critique of the economic structures that created the problem in the first place. It is a discourse of green capitalism that even astute leaders with a socially just analysis like Van Jones side with.[10]

**Alternative Economies**

The second circulating discourse in the meetings and conversations that constitute this

local ethnography, is the idea of alternative economies. This is the discourse of both the liberal and radical left who focus on supporting and creating alternative economic structures and practices such as worker-owned cooperatives, the solidarity economy (as modeled after movements in Brazil), exchange economies, community-owned businesses or utilities, and community supported agriculture. This discourse is not always completely distinct from the sustainable capitalist discourse. Indeed, respondents in my ethnography themselves questioned whether specific actions or forms were system-changing or merely constituted other forms of capitalism. At *High Road*, for example, during a discussion about the difference between creating jobs and creating a new economy, Jack asserted that "there's a difference. . . between creating a coalition to create an economy versus being a form that participates in the capitalist economy." He argued that labor unions constitute a capitalist form, and that even alternative economic movements like the famous cooperative, *Mondragon*, do not pass the test of social change, because they do not transform the capitalist economy, they only succeed in competing with it (Field Notes, August 14, 2013).

Issues and practices that make up the alternative economic landscape are politically positioned in ways that travel the continuum between profound critiques of capitalism and a comfortable fit inside its margins. Alternative economic structures such as The Buy Local or Fair Trade movements for example, consist of social actors whose views range in their assessment of the need for systemic economic change. It is important to note how varied this discourse is and how it is also used simultaneously with market-oriented discourse. As explained above, the concept of "the green economy," also travels between a capitalist orientation of a green economy that is imagined as vastly improved by

transitions to clean energy and energy efficiency; and an anti-capitalist orientation in which the green economy is imagined as an alternative economic system wherein "enterprises, trade, and finance . . . privilege community and ecological well-being over individual gain" (Worcester SAGE Alliance 2012). National voices too, reflect the potential of climate change to usher in transformational change inclusive of clean energy and social justice. Author and activist Naomi Klein for example, makes the case that upending capitalism is the key to solving global warming (Klein 2014).

Carl Anthony emphasizes that, "the issue of capitalism has to be taken into account." He advocates that, "you need to save the markets from capitalism," underscoring that there are different kinds of ownership, some of which are not as destructive as the ownership model generated by capitalism: "there are healthy markets that can be fostered" (Field Notes June 2008). This is one part of the language of alternative economies. Another is the centrality of social justice that comes out of the environmental justice tradition. As Anthony puts it: "if we're going to make a transition to sustainability, we have to bring in justice. It's not peripheral, it's mainstream" (Field Notes June 2008). In addition, the need to create more room for political movement by threading needles of reform as well as resistance exists here as well. As one long-time activist at a Solidarity and Green Economy Conference I attended put it: "If we think of it as just an alternative economic approach we'll hit against the wall and not have enough space to change. Or, if we only hit up against the big companies, there's not enough room to develop alternatives" (Field notes, October 13, 2012).

**Social Justice**

The third discourse that circulates prominently in this ethnography is social justice discourse. Here, I include discourse that centers anti-racism, class analysis, environmental justice, climate justice, just sustainability, and labor activism. Race and class constituted the two main vectors of a social justice analysis in this context. Class analyses figured more prominently than racial analyses, a function, in part, of the steep segregation of the region in which this ethnography takes place; the perceived dominance of a white demographic in this region; and the virtually white and strikingly old demographics of the meetings I attended. So, while anti-capitalist orientations tended to go together with analyses that centered institutional oppression, race was less articulated in this discourse, and sometimes even questioned by privileged whites as to its relevancy for sustainability goals. For example, some respondents raised concerns about what they perceived as an over-emphasis on *Democratic Energy's* multiracial goals at the expense of its clean energy goals (Field Notes September 15, 2012). Thus, discourses dipped in colorblind ideology lived quite comfortably alongside climate change justice goals and articulations of the need to change "business as usual."

Climate justice closely parallels the discourse of environmental justice on the one hand, while on the other, draws from sustainability discourse that is shaped by neoliberalism and the "right to development" as conceived in traditionally capitalistic ways. Climate justice discourse also adds another thread regarding the meaning of justice: that of intergenerational justice. This is the right of future generations to inherit a planet that is not so environmentally degraded as to limit their chances of survival. Again, as in the case of alternative economy discourses, social justice discourse ranged dramatically in

terms of the specific conceptualizations, priorities, and perceived intersections of justice.

What is important to underscore is the persistence with which some kind of language of

justice pervaded many of the specific visions and goals of individuals and organizations

working for what they framed as a more sustainable, clean energy world.

**Systemic Transformation**

Intertwined with the alternative economic discourse and the social justice discourses, but

distinct enough that it is worth mentioning, is a discourse I call "systemic transformation

discourse." This is the discourse of the Occupy Movement; of the oft-cited declaration

"Another World is Possible;" of anti-globalization and anti-capitalism as well as human

ecology. It is the discourse that emphasizes a great need for systemic change, not merely

reform. It is the discourse that imagines an entirely different future based on overturning

processes of dichotomous thinking, corporate greed, hierarchy, and oppression.

<u>**Conclusion**</u>

In this chapter, I have attempted to show how the frameworks of sustainability and

environmental justice are central to the way that local communities understand and

organize in the face of climate change and its effects; as are the tensions that exist

between them. I argue that the frameworks of sustainability and environmental justice

undergird the discursive frameworks of local interactions that address climate change.

These frameworks also shape green economic practices, alternative economic projects,

and visions of systemic transformation. In the next chapter, I will delve into the data to

show how ideas of sustainability and environmental justice are key to conversations and

interactions in the formation of new climate change publics.

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[1] Rachel Carson was an American marine biologist who wrote many books for the public about ocean life and ecology. She is most famous for her book, *Silent Spring*, published in 1962 in which she argued against pesticide use by the US government and agricultural scientists. She advocated for an environmental framework that took into account the vulnerability of ecosystems including the vulnerability of human beings. This book was widely read and shaped a turning point in public awareness about the need for policies to protect people and the environment.
Ernest Shumaker was a British economist who wrote the highly influential book, *Small is Beautiful* (1973). He argued that the modern post-industrial economy was unsustainable and that societies ought to organize economically on the basis of well-being and the appreciation of limits, rather than on the basis of a logic of growth capitalism and the uncompromising expenditure of non-renewable resources.

[2] This report was titled: *Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and Their Correlation With Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities,* GAO 1982.

[3] Elisa Martinez, a graduate student in sociology who specializes in global NGO work, suggests that these discourses may have different geo-spatial habitats.  That is, sustainability discourse might be more resonant on the international political stage by virtue of it being driven by a global capitalist class; while justice resonates more with locals actors struggling for local concerns (Personal communication, January 21, 2015).

[4] Interestingly, Gro Brundtland is currently on the advisory board of The Mary Robinson's Foundation – Climate Change

[5] Food justice is the environmental justice component of the alternative food movement, advocating that food practices be thought of not only in terms of sustainable environmental practices, but in terms of the structural, and most especially, the race and class constraints, embedded in cultural and institutional processes of food access and food sovereignty (Alkon & Agyeman 2011).

[6] Energy justice likewise, is rooted in environmental justice terms.  This term exists in relative obscurity to mainstream sustainability movements and to sociology scholars, despite the fact that sociology of energy scholars underscore the inequities embedded in the social relations produced in and through energy production, energy distribution and energy consumption (Lutzenhiser 1994; Rosa, Machlis & Keating 1988); as well as the importance of looking at the social consequences of energy policy (Clancy et.al; Lutzenhiser 1994); and despite the fact that environmental justice scholars document and analyze the structural racism and colonialism embedded in energy extraction and waste disposal (Robinson 1992; Smith 2005). As easy sources of cheap oil and gas dry up, predatory corporate behavior to claim rights to what is left "will become more frequent and brutal" (Klare 2012) suggesting that community struggles for energy justice will also become more prevalent and further reaching.  Most clear on the subject of energy justice and the use of this concept to reflect on a whole host of unequal relationships between energy systems and society are Native American communities who have arguably suffered the most egregious and inequitable effects of energy injustice (Honor the Earth et. al, d.u; Smith 2005).

[7] Environmental justice is also central to the climate justice movement, which draws from the twin goals of distributive and procedural justice to "remove the specific global underlying causes of climate change as well as its inequitable global impacts" (Evans 2010; Goodman 2009).  It is a relatively new term, having been first articulated at the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (Goodman 2009).  Climate justice campaigns are global in scope.  They seek to address the root causes of climate

change (Evans 2010); assert the rights of affected communities (Evans 2010); and challenge the corporate hold over fossil fuel-based energy systems as with recent student-led college and university divestment initiatives inspired by Bill McKibben and 350.org organizers (Nathanson 2013). While climate justice activists underscore the direct conflict between neoliberal corporate economies and climate change solutions (Goodman 2009), climate justice activism is a broad-based movement that is also shaped by the "right to development" discourses of international sustainability paradigms that emphasize the centrality of human rights, and especially the right of people to provide for their families in the face of extreme weather patterns such as drought and floods (Robinson 2013; Di Chiro 2008).

[8] The problem with this framework is that it has almost exclusively been the terrain of academics who bring this framework to bear in their research and theoretical work. Whereas EJ scholars have been critiqued for being too narrowly focused on the particulars of the field at the expense of theoretical engagement, *just sustainability*, though it expands environmental justice tenets by focusing on theory, has not yet made its mark in on-the-ground activism. At one local organizing meeting I attended for example, the only people in the room who knew about the term "just sustainability" were two graduate students (including myself) contributing to the conversation, whereas the language of environmental justice was fully integrated into local organizers' vocabulary and orientation.

[9] As mentioned in Chapter One, well-known speakers came to the Pioneer Valley to inspire people to get involved in envisioning sustainable and just futures and joining specific campaigns. Bill Mckibben, representing 350.org, rallied crowds to pressure local colleges and universities to divest from big oil companies. Majora Carter spoke about urban sustainability and green jobs, based on her work greening the South Bronx. And Carl Anthony and Robert Bullard each spoke about the importance of environmental justice activism in leading the way to climate activism.

[10] In Jones' view, "there is a struggle going on within the upper echelons of US capital. It is a struggle that can be characterized as between the military-petroleum complex that's still the dominant bloc of capital, and greener, less polluting forms of capital." Jones emphasizes that he is "trying to thread a needle" between a political Left that he claims offers no practical policy solutions, and the reality of "mass incarceration, economic injustice, and environmental degradation" which disproportionately affects people of color. In order to be able to advocate for living wage jobs, bargaining rights, restorative justice, wealth creation, and environmental health, Jones feels it is essential to make alliances with stakeholders that are "more favorable to democratic forces" than to "authoritarian" ones, rather than critique the capitalist elite in one broad stroke (Jones in (Mirpuri et. Al. 405).

**CHAPTER 4**
**DISCURSIVE PROCESSES IN THE FIELD:**
**EMPHATIC VISIONS AND SLIPPERY FOOTINGS**

**<u>Introduction</u>**

At a Jobs With Justice Conference in the spring of 2008, I observed an audience member

pointedly ask a green jobs panel "what are you going to do to ensure that a person of

color, a poor person, or a woman gets these jobs?" The panel consisted of primarily

middle class and white policy makers and advocates from several environmental and

political organizations, including 1Sky, the Sierra Club, Clean Water Action, and the

Providence, Rhode Island City Council. The panelists had been discussing the

transformative potential of green jobs that would simultaneously address climate change

and poverty. Each panelist lauded green jobs as both a sign and a vehicle for a more just

*and* a more sustainable future for people and the planet. When confronted with the

demand to provide concrete elaboration of exactly how green jobs would create

"pathways out of poverty" however, the panelists did not have any specific answers.

There was a real gap between the ideals of a discourse that promised transformation, or at

least, the potential of economic and social transformation; and specific plans for

implementing or attempting to apply those ideals. This gap between the discourse of

sustainability and justice and concrete action presented itself time and time again in the

many interactions I observed and participated in. Organizations and actors struggled with

the ongoing question of how to ground the ideological in the material, particularly since it

concerned such broad issues – climate change, clean energy, social justice – where few

road maps existed. Each struggled to formulate and fine-tune their visions as well as to

find ways to enact that vision, while working with existing structures, programs, and funding opportunities.

While all social movements experience an inevitable gap between discourse and action; between ideas and application; and between vision and feasibility — this gap repeatedly presented itself as a particularly intractable problem for local organizers around climate change. As Paul Lichterman has stated in his work on movement actors: "We need to see the gaps between aspirations and actions not only because they are sociology's prime puzzles but because. . . They are also citizens' own puzzles" (Lichterman 2009 863).

People spent a lot of time discussing potential action steps, to the point where participants sometimes lost sight of the goal of working together, or felt that they didn't have any ideas. *Democratic Energy* was successful at implementing programs that succeeded in linking sustainability and justice in terms of job access and locally owned energy projects. Most notably, it successfully garnered state grants for green jobs training and partnered with an organization in Holyoke to train disadvantaged youth. A number of graduates went on to land energy efficiency jobs at a local energy efficiency company that was a business off-shoot of *Democratic Energy* as well. *Democratic Energy* also built a biodiesel plant with state funding, member investments and local donations that would create locally owned renewable energy. In rallying others to join their cause, however, *Democratic Energy* relied on the energy and ideas of new members and volunteers to keep new projects going, yet, there was no easy way to map out clear steps to bridge the connection between sustainability and justice.

At *High Road*, a conversation about what the organization might do or should do was in constant play. "We're sort of having the same conversations over and over," said one respondent (Field Notes May 18, 2012). When one member got frustrated at the apparent lack of action at *High Road*, he asked, "what is our goal as *High Road*?" Another replied, "I think we do have a purpose. We already talked about it ad nauseum for years" (April 25, 2012). On the one hand, the ideological goals were articulated at every *High Road* meeting. Conversations embodied a kind of action in and of themselves. On the other hand, members questioned whether these conversations held any value without parlaying these into another level of action that might affect more visible change.

While the goals of sustainability and justice were difficult to translate into concrete, viable, and lasting projects, and while project implementation was very dependent upon state funding and wealthy investors, interactions on the ground revealed a strong sense of emerging values. It was, as Jamison has noted elsewhere, a dynamic in which "An awareness throughout the world is emerging about the need for a movement for climate justice but. . .there is little agreement as to what the movement should do and how it should organize itself" (Jamison 2010, 817). For the groups that I studied, funding issues and the availability of time compounded organizing challenges. In addition, the work of creating awareness was somewhat at odds with both the desire to accomplish material change (as in the case of *High Road*); and the financial pressure to establish viable sustainability products and services (as in the case of *Democratic Energy*).

In this chapter then, I give a detailed empirical account of the three organizations that I research as case studies of an emerging green public. I offer a brief history of each

organization and show their development over time. I take a specific look at the way in which these organizations engaged discursively with issues of sustainability and justice by documenting significant interactions between members and participants as they work to articulate their visions for change, and make collective decisions about action steps. In documenting the different ways that each organization struggled to define itself and to find ways to enact its visions, I show how *agency* constitutes a persistent and nagging problem in emerging publics of sustainability and justice.

The gap between discourse and action presented a tenacious conundrum for organizers and participants. I argue that collective agency in emerging publics is constrained, in part, by tensions between the discursive threads of sustainability, on the one hand, and justice on the other; tensions which chapter 3 revealed exist in the discursive legacies of each concept. Further, these tensions are deepened by institutional and political tensions that inhere when people try to integrate social justice with environmental sustainability in the face of market and state interests that impact the viability of the organizations they participate in, and the jobs they are employed in. Finally, I suggest that if members of emerging publics can more effectively clarify the tensions between sustainability and justice in the discourse— a discourse which is compelling many members to show up and act in the first place— this emerging public may be strengthened. That is, while many members of this public can see the significance of linking sustainability and justice, the discourse itself remains vague. Unpacking these concepts, their legacies, and their relationship to one another more clearly might strengthen the discursive power that inheres in these emerging publics to help make these emerging publics more effective

bodies of political advocacy and change.

The chapter concentrates on the three organizations I studied, *High Road*, *Democratic Energy*, and *Green Net*. All of these organizations were new when I began to attend their meetings. *Democratic Energy* started in 2005; *High Road* in 2008; and *Green Net* in 2009. As I attended meetings at these three organizations and in the local network at large, I could see the discourse evolve over time. For example, in 2008, meetings at *High Road* focused heavily on the concept of the green economy, a term that was not deployed as often by the years 2012 and 2013. Because the data covers a period of several years, I illuminate the discursive in the context of its emergence over time.

## Part One: High Road

### High Road Discourse: Social Justice and the Green Economy

*High Road* started out in the fall of 2008. It began in direct response to national and state fervor over the rise of an imminent green economy and the prospect of green jobs as a way to solve both climate change and chronic unemployment. There was a fervor in the air about the "coming" green economy. People gathered to prepare for what analysts predicted was going to be the growth of the green economy. People came together to anticipate necessary training programs to prepare job seekers for new jobs; to take advantage of new state policy and programs that could grow their businesses; to ensure that new green jobs would not be exploitative; or to advocate that the new green economy reflect the needs and visions of community groups. It was the latter two issues: empowering community and ensuring high road labor practices in the new green economy that motivated the founders of *High Road* and shaped the organization as it

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developed from a conversation, to a network, to an incorporated non-profit.

*High Road* was started by longtime activists, and friends in the struggle, Juan, a Latino community activist originally from Panama, and Jack, a white labor activist with a national labor advocacy group. These founders drew on their extensive local networks to invite community groups, labor groups, small business owners, and members of the public to join them in formulating a vision of a socially just green economy, an invitation that remained open as *High Road* progressed.

Over the years, the discourse at *High Road* held fast to a critique of green capitalism. At the same time, it sometimes deferred to the reality of green capitalism in the process of advocating for social justice within existing modes of economic relations, even as it sought to articulate alternative economic approaches as important processes and possibilities of change. *High Road*'s orientation turned around the concept of the green economy. The organization expressed a commitment to a vision of socially just, sustainable economics. It was supportive of alternative economic structures, networking with sustainable economy activists from Brazil and the Pioneer Valley, as well as with the local worker cooperative movement.

One of its main original goals was for community and labor to have a voice in the evolution of a green economy. As Juan put it, "Whatever happens in this historical context, we wanted to have community and labor united in a common purpose of justice, rights and sustainability" (Field Notes February 17, 2009). In the following sections, I show how *High Road* evolved from its beginnings as a community invitation to imagine a high road green economy, to a shoestring non-profit organization. *High Road* evolved to

see itself as a convener of local groups that could educate themselves and one another about sustainability issues, in order to advocate more effectively for sustainable practices that were inclusive of social justice.

**Brief History of High Road**

Throughout the time that I attended *High Road* meetings, conversation was shaped simultaneously around the question of what kind of organization *High Road* was and could be, and around green economy themes that speakers came to present during its first meetings.  Convening people to discuss ways to organize a socially just vision of a green economy involved inviting people to make presentations. At its outset, *High Road* convened vibrant roundtables which included representatives from community organizations, state agencies, and local green businesses such as *Boston's Community Labor United*, *Pedal People* (a bicycle hauling company)*,* Regional Employment Boards, the *Pioneer Valley Planning Commission*, the *University of Massachusetts*, as well as state senator Ben Downing and *Green Party* candidate Jill Stein. Attendees included a wide range of local organizers and professionals such as workforce development managers, local entrepreneurs, and community organizers who were invited through local labor list serves as well as press releases.

Beginning in June of 2008, *High Road* began to articulate a vision for itself that included holding businesses, municipalities, and organizations accountable to principles and practices of socially just, sustainable, and equitable green employment, initiatives, and policies. As part of this process, *High Road* ratified a set of green economy accountability principles at a public meeting in June of 2009 that it modeled closely after principles

developed by the *Green Justice Coalition* in Boston as well as the *AFL-CIO Green Jobs Center*. This included principles such as "Green jobs must be community jobs" that benefit local communities with "family supporting wages, health care and retirement security." The list also included social justice guidelines for assessing green economic initiatives, articulating that these "should prioritize communities of color and low-income communities" and "must include meaningful and active participation and decision-making from all community segments." Jon, one of the main founders expressed that what was unique about *High Road* was its principles of high road economics and community voice. He asserted the following at one meeting in which *High Road* participants were discussing the possible directions for the group:

> "The idea of collaboration -- of avoiding competition for grant monies -- that's gotta be the focus. It's gotta be about letting the community groups and citizens say what they want . . . It's gotta be what they say in Boston: green justice. When you build an organization around the idea of justice, you're not saying 'I know what justice is for you' but you listen: 'I want to hear you.'" (Field Notes February 17, 2009).

Accountability remained a main theme that drove the interests of its founders: how to hold actors in the green economy, especially businesses and employers, accountable for just labor practices; and how to ensure that worker ownership and worker empowerment remained on the table in any discussion about new local initiatives. Over time, the shape that notions of accountability took came to involve corporate accountability and labor accountability more than racial, environmental justice accountability, or citizen accountability per se -- even though these ideas shaped the foundation of *High Road*'s purpose.

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After about six months of meetings, *High Road*'s goals began to settle into three main

areas of focus. *High Road* members articulated themselves as being in the process of

"transitioning to an organization with three operational planks" which included:

1. Organizing roundtables
2. Creating and supporting green economic initiatives and
3. Accountability and oversight.

At its outset, roundtables were created "to provide a vehicle for education around green

economic initiatives; a forum for sharing research and presenting projects; and an

organizing tool for grassroots initiatives, organized labor, and communities." As

stakeholders and community members met to discuss the possibilities for working

together on green economy goals, different options were voiced, that focused both on

setting goals and outlining the organizational process itself. The roundtables came out of

a sense that it was necessary for everyone to get educated — to know what was

happening in the green economy. At first, this idea was to establish preliminary

understandings of what was out there and how to connect with it. For example, in the first

few meetings of *High Road*, one longtime community organizer from Holyoke suggested

that the group participate in:

> "listening and getting ourselves educated. We need to understand where is the
> money coming from?  Is the green bill going to pass?  Let's bring people in to talk
> about that.  Then, in the fall, we can act" (July 23, 2008).

This "let's get educated" impulse became one of *High Road*'s primary activities. During

2010, *High Road*'s founders spent considerable time meeting in a smaller group to

incorporate as a non-profit, soliciting the help of a labor leader, Kathy, who worked as a

top manager for a contractor firm, and who had experience running successful

responsible employer policy and ordinance campaigns. *High Road* received non-profit

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status in 2011, and hired its first intern at part-time status, in 2013. Kathy, who was instrumental in helping the founders incorporate *High Road* as a non-profit, served as the board president from 2011 to February 2014. During this time, the roundtables continued to be the central focus of *High Road*'s efforts. In addition, *High Road* published one extensive newsletter and the beginnings of a website, with the intent to link information in subsequent newsletters and web content to the framework of each roundtable. The volunteer effort that this demanded turned out to be unfeasible, and the newsletter was tabled after its first publication in the spring of 2012.

*High Road* meetings and roundtables were held in the meeting room of a local labor organizing office that housed several labor organizations, where the bathrooms were labeled *sisters* and *brothers*, and the walls included a poster of the Haymarket strike in Chicago, a Solidarnosc poster, and another that read "organizing for justice in our community." In the meeting room, which comfortably held up to 30 people, two long folding tables stood side to side, circled by metal folding chairs and a side table that was occasionally set up with a sweet snack like donuts or brownies, and coffee. The furniture and the walls reflected low-budget imperatives. This space was not borne out of large grants, corporate sponsorship, or comfortable profit margins. It breathed a sigh of tenacious fatigue, in which the fight for justice, for labor rights, and worker safety, were integral to the work and the gathering that propelled this space, against the ravages of a neoliberal economy that has gutted union activity and political clout over the course of the last forty years.

**Social Justice Approaches to Sustainability: From Race to Labor**

Democracy, equity, lifting all boats, doing business differently — these all figured as

essential concepts and motivators of the initial and ongoing conversations about *High*

*Road*'s goals and intentions. Ideas that centered sustainability as inclusive of social

justice were central to the discourse at *High Road* from the beginning. From its inception

as a working group to its incorporation as a non-profit and beyond, *High Road* acted as a

vehicle that participated in advocating for a socially just approach to the green economy.

And later, as the phrase "green economy" lost its vigor and took a back seat, *High Road*

advocated for a socially just approach to sustainability and the "sustainable economy."

*High Road*'s approach to social justice however, changed from an initial strong

commitment to anti-racism and the principles of environmental justice to a formulation of

justice that was articulated primarily in terms of labor rights — the right to bargain, the

right to a living wage, and the right to worker safety and protection. Juan highlighted how

he did not see people of color represented in new economic initiatives and wanted to

make sure that engagement in the green economy would be more participatory (February

17, 2009). During the first couple of meetings, when *High Road* was not yet an

organization, he emphasized his interest in creating a multi-racial, multi-class coalition to

address the development of green jobs in western Massachusetts.  A few community

organizers at the table echoed this perspective saying things like:

> "we want to look for ways that the very bottom of the economic scale can
> participate in the green economy" (Field notes June 25, 2008).

Key to *High Road*'s discourse and practice was a conscious intent to be a change maker

— sometimes in terms that invoked a larger movement of democratic change, always as

part of an effort for change expressed through coming together to learn, educate, and strategize, especially across race and class. For example, at the beginning of *High Road*'s meetings, Juan emphasized:

> "we need a community driven process whereby representatives can listen to the needs of community. The purpose is to think about how do we go across our different barriers of race and gender and locality?" (Field Notes, June 25, 2008)

*High Road* founders also wanted to integrate environmental justice principles into their approach. At the very beginning of *High Road*'s inception, they invited community organizers from an organization called *ACE* in Boston who were taking an environmental justice approach to organizing in the green economy. *High Road* organizers encouraged members to consider emulating the work that this organization was doing. A white female representative from this group explained that her organization had been using the word "green economy" for less than a year (this was 2008). She offered that from an environmental justice perspective, a green economy has the opportunity to correct race and class injustices if done right. She emphasized that base-building groups and communities of color should set the agenda and lead the decision making in order to ensure accountability to people of color, community groups and labor groups.

While this meeting was inspiring to the founders and to many others in attendance, participants at the table did not, for the most part, represent communities of color. People in attendance included entrepreneurs and representatives of state-funded agencies who worked with communities of color, but who were not from base-building organizations. As such, many participants at the table were one or two steps removed from the kind of accountability to community that the organizer from Boston was talking about.

In addition, while the founders had clear ideas for integrating justice with sustainability, community members who came to the meetings voiced other interests that were at odds with the liberatory impulse of the founders' intentions for gathering people together. Because the founders were also looking to participants to help shape a vision and a goal for a green economy, the tension of other vested interests — that of implementing state policy or finding ways to network professionally in a burgeoning green economy, for example — took up significant space and time in shaping the direction of the budding organization. Even though state agency participation in *High Road*'s meetings did not change the ideological premise of the organization, the influence of these stakeholders did dilute the social change orientation of *High Road*'s activity. For example, one workforce development manager, Leon, an African American man, bristled at the social change goals embedded in the conversation. "We cannot solve all the world's problems at this table," he said, clearly annoyed at what he perceived as an elusive goal. A major participant at the outset of formulating *High Road*'s goals, Leon advocated that the group should focus on what he saw as the practical specifics of green jobs training opportunities and the grants[1] that could be marshaled to fund these programs:

> "I am looking at grants that the government will fund. . . I have to make sure the core focus is about jobs and clean energy initiatives. . . I can't belong to an organization that is strictly advocacy for justice" (Field notes June 2008).

At a meeting more than seven months later Leon articulated the rub between dominant mainstream visions of a green economy that does not challenge capitalism, and oppositional orientations that see justice as integral to sustainability:

> "I have a concern this group does not become polarized or looked at as an enemy to businesses coming into the region. I believe in worker's rights, but there is a fine line when you become too aggressive. I would just hate this group to be

viewed as getting polarized. Consider these things versus strong-arming people and preventing growth" (February 17, 2009).

Other attendees also articulated a more state-centric, and business oriented approach. One participant, a financial broker who attended *High Road*'s early meetings suggested that *High Road* could focus on research and education – the group could find out what grants might be available, or what training programs exist in order to disseminate this information to the wider community. Another participant attended several *High Road* meetings in order to promote networking between the University of Massachusetts and local communities, especially from a research and development perspective, and to support new green business activity in the area.

As founders who held a kind of final word on the fundamental direction of *High Road*, Jack and Juan were less interested in positioning the fledgling coalition to take advantage of bureaucratic or business opportunities. In response to Leon, Jack emphasized the original intent of the two men who called the meeting: "[we want] to create a movement that can put pressure on leaders so there's more democracy. . . we're trying to build a united front." Three years later, Jack remained consistent on this point. As he explained to one roundtable speaker: "we're about the community creating the social force that flips the economy from competitive to cooperative so it's not about businesses, it's about people" (Field Notes, November 30, 2011).

This points to a dynamic that made it difficult for the discourse of justice and sustainability to have room to breathe. Many attendees came to *High Road* events because the networking opportunities were important for their jobs and professions,

lending an instrumental aspect to *High Road* that was never really unpacked. This, combined with the democratic approach in which attendees were invited to participate in the *making* of *High Road* (especially in its first few years), made it difficult for the organization to effectively position itself, especially in terms of its social change goals. While *High Road* had an activist vision, many stakeholders attended these meetings as employees of state agencies, community organizations, or labor unions — their professions shaping the nature of what they felt should be done, and what they felt they could do. Thus, attendees often came to the table as green economy and sustainability actors looking to network as leaders of non-profits fulfilling grant obligations; and as small business owners and entrepreneurs looking to market their products and services (including *Democratic Energy*). While many came in the context of professions that claimed to make some sort of sustainable or social change difference; the fact that they came in the context of fulfilling their job obligations seriously limited the kind of visionary activism that *High Road* was advocating for.

On the flip side, when *High Road* tried to emphasize its community-based approach, it was met with resistance by community leaders who felt that the group should not go ahead with writing out its intentions and principles without more community-based organizations at the table. At one meeting, a seasoned community activist from a tenant's right organization insisted that the group not spend time writing out its intentions because "it has to be a group decision." When participants suggested using the list serve of contacts to generate discussion and flesh out the principles of what was then being discussed as a possible coalition, she said of herself and the members of her community based organization: "we're not gonna participate in a list serve discussion -- it's not

something we do." She further stressed that she felt that the small number of people represented at the table (6) represented "a tyranny of the minority with the most time on our hands" (Field Notes, mid-November, 2008).

While *High Road* retained environmental justice and racial justice goals in its written principles, envisioning *High Road* as "a vehicle for the disenfranchised to participate" in the green economy (Field Notes Nov 2008); the racial justice and environmental justice possibilities of convening a social justice oriented green economy working group quickly fell by the wayside in terms of the discursive content and process at the roundtables and in the board room. What was reformulated most strongly over the years was a solid commitment to labor advocacy, such that many who came to *High Road* events as speakers, organizational representatives, or as members of the public expressed that they thought it was primarily a labor organization. In part, this was because Juan got busy with other commitments and did not attend *High Road* as regularly from the fall of 2012 onwards. He had been instrumental at keeping racial justice on the table.

A perception that *High Road* was primarily a labor thing also stemmed from the fact that meetings were held in a labor office, a function of Jack's work as a labor organizer and the availability of in-kind resources for an effort that was relevant to labor. This perception was also shaped by the fact that over time, the core members of *High Road* primarily represented labor groups such as local unions, Mass COSH, and Jobs with Justice. In September 2012, for example, a staff member of a workforce development program who was invited to speak with *High Road*'s board about possibilities for collaboration between *High Road* and her organization, asked whether *High Road* was "a

*Jobs with Justice* thing." Jack, a longtime labor organizer, as well as a founder of *High Road* responded:

> "Somewhere along the way we said, 'it has to be more than labor.' Sometimes the issues are more important, for example, transportation. Now that *High Road* is a 501C-3, that really means that we'd like to have the position in the community of checking facts – like a go-to-place" (Field Notes September 26, 2012).

Part of the idea of the roundtables, as mentioned earlier, was for community players to be able to educate themselves on the issues. This included the idea that *High Road* activists be able to be knowledgeable about all aspects of the green economy. But here, Jack was introducing an idea that the organization wanted to have some authority around the production and distribution of knowledge in the local green economy, an idea that was neither openly shared nor refuted by others in the group, but which continued to manifest sporadically over the next couple of years.

When *High Road* incorporated as a non-profit in 2011, it continued to grapple with what *High Road* should be and how it could best implement its goals, but these conversations were now relegated to the board room. At public roundtables from 2011 onwards, *High Road* leaders articulated their vision of *High Road* in more concrete and assertive terms, introducing *High Road* as "a convener of organizations," explaining *High Road* in the following terms:

> "The idea is we get educated. We have a panel. The idea is there's some opportunity for networking too. We work with an eye towards sustainability. Our definition of "green" does not stop with the environment. If we're gonna sustain the economy, we have to sustain society. We're devoted to enhancing workers' rights, bargaining and communities." (Field Notes October 24, 2012).

*High Road* was also described as a coalition of labor and community groups that facilitated roundtables as a way to get people to network and develop action plans:

"*High Road* is a coalition of labor groups, environmental groups, and other folks interested in creating a sustainable economy in western MA. We're a fledgling organization. We've been doing roundtables for a long time. *High Road* is involved in statewide transportation equity – last month we had a roundtable on the [Transportation Authority]. We've had roundtables on other sustainability issues. We're planning other roundtables: one on wind; one on solar; one on fracking – I'm sure you've all heard. In January, we will have. . . a presentation on Climate Action. It's an opportunity to get folks in the room together and talk and hopefully develop some action around the issues." (Field Notes November 28, 2012).

*High Road* leaders who were committed to the potential for *High Road* to become an advocacy organization that could hold local initiatives accountable for socially just as well as green practices, expressed frequent frustration at the difference between *High Road*'s ideals, or ideologies of change, and its capacity to affect change. In the next section, I elaborate further on how respondents engaged with this struggle.

**High Road Footholds: Tensions Between Activist Impulse and Fledgling Convener**

As the years progressed, conversations at board meetings and retreats often centered on questions as to whether *High Road* should or could affect change. Sometimes members expressed frustration at the lack of funds the organization had, especially the fact that without a full-time staff member, it was virtually impossible to be effective as an organization. At other times, members bemoaned the lack of authority *High Road* held among the public or among other organizations. For example, one member expressed:

"We need to assert that *High Road* exists. Right now, the upper valley is taking up all the conceptual space about everything green – they don't even know we exist" (Field Notes Nov 28, 2012).

While frustrations about the difference between its vision and its capacity were always present, the idea that *High Road* was still doing something important, something useful

that was important to social change was equally strong.

This tension ran through many conversations. While the roundtables constituted a relatively straightforward activity to organize, just establishing the theme and purpose for upcoming roundtables would bring up ongoing fundamental issues of organizational purpose, overarching goals, and especially, the conflict between the intent to be an activist organization and the reality of a shoestring budget and a volunteer-based work structure. At a board meeting in April 2012 for example, Jack asked the group what *High Road*'s overarching goal should be for the roundtables it was to organize for the coming year. Juan replied that one of the main areas of focus ought to be job development.

Another participant, Leo, a labor leader in an ironworker Local, replied "that's what I'm talking about." He proceeded to tell a story about how local towns have long term plans to build wind turbines and are using out-of-state labor to erect them. He advocated that *High Road* invite politicians and local companies to "put the heat on" towns about contracting with responsible contractors who would commit to hiring local labor.

The group, however, had not decided to run a campaign, and the agenda at that moment was to try to focus on roundtable planning. As such, the group proceeded to gloss over Leo's idea and brought the focus back to the goal for the next year of roundtables. Juan reiterated that he thought there should be an overarching job creation theme, "something like: 'local jobs matter.'" Another member, Sam, a labor organizer for student workers at local colleges and universities, did not want to leave the conversation at the level of themes. He expressed concern about the overall goal of *High Road*, asserting that he wants to see it build its capacity to affect more social action:

"The roundtable and the publication – these are things we could do without a lot of resources. If the same number of people are in the room every time, we're not building capacity. It's more important to get more people involved and excited. Then we have resources to do concrete projects" (Field Notes, April 25, 2012).

Jack doesn't think it's time to talk about concrete projects. Juan emphasizes the success of having incorporated as a non-profit, reiterating again, the choice of an overarching theme that developed out of the goals of the organization:

"We've already made a major step incorporating and doing this. We can develop the program for the next year of roundtable discussions with the overarching themes of job creation" (Field Notes, April 25, 2012).

As this is happening, an out-of-town guest to the board meeting pipes up:

"I work for Climate Watch Action and Green Justice Coalition in Boston. I'm shocked about this discussion. The secretary at the EEA (Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs of the State of Massachusetts) – what they need to see to invest more resources is to demonstrate support for wind from all over the state – labor, community based organizations, etc. The anti-wind people are small but strong. A lot of groups are hungry for making connections with folks like yourselves" (Field Notes, April 25, 2012).

As a guest who is new to *High Road*, this organizer is surprised by the level of support he is witnessing in the western part of the state for wind power and for a green economy that incorporates social justice perspectives. He suggests that the roundtable theme could be to think about how to build a broader base of support for this kind of clean energy development — that this is in part what is so necessary: building the conversation, and building a network.

"Building the conversation" is key to what *High Road* started out facilitating. And as time went on, this idea of bringing stakeholders together to discuss issues that pertain to a socially just green economy is still central to its goals. However, there is a clear level of frustration about the question "conversation to what end?" For the organizer from

Boston, building the conversation is tantamount to building a broader base of support at a state-wide level, in part, in order to pressure the state for more investment in clean energy and socially just green economic initiatives. Focusing on state policy advocacy, however, was never one of *High Road*'s goals.

For *High Road*, originally, the purpose was to have a say in what the green economy was going to look like. It rooted itself in both a discourse of alternative economies and a discourse of social justice. Not surprisingly, both of these discourses — the alternative economy and social justice — were understood differently and weighed differently by different members. For example, a year after the above conversation, Jack reflected: "we're not giving up on the bigger picture – we're not giving up on an alternative economy." Notably, Kathy, now a central member of the group disagreed, and reflected back: "But we never said that – that we're building an alternative economy" (Field Notes August 14, 2013).

This conversation — that involved a banter that travelled along the bounds of *High Road*'s purpose, its capacity, and its effectiveness so far — repeated itself in different forms at many of the meetings I attended. At a retreat in the summer of 2013, a core group of *High Road* members met at Kathy's suburban home to discuss the future of *High Road*. Six of us sat outside on a windy day on her patio, later moving inside to a cozy living room when the wind got too cold.  Notably, all of us were white, and two of us, including myself, and a white male student named Harlan, were graduate students from the University of Massachusetts studying *High Road* for our dissertations. One member, Matt, a white man in his sixties who grew up in a farming community in

western Mass, was there in his capacity as an organizer for *Mass COSH*. Another

member, Nancy, a white female activist in her sixties who was part of a local group of

anti-Nuclear activists, was there in her capacity as an organizer for an economic justice

organization. Together, we talked about whether *High Road* should continue, given its

financial and volunteer time constraints, and if so, in what capacity. Around a coffee

table with plates of strawberries, cheese and crackers, the conversation about whether

*High Road* should run a campaign or convene groups to educate one another continued:

> Jack: If we give up *High Road* doing a campaign, I would like to participate to
> say why other groups are doing that (running a particular campaign). If you're an
> environmental group [for example] – you should be able to come to *High Road*
> and ask how to come to labor. We have had tense relations between labor and
> community. We need organizers to come into a place for education and then send
> them back out with the connections they've made, so there's a strong connection
> between [the community organization] and the electrician union representative.
> And then, when it's time to split positions over biomass, they can chat, and at
> least behave better [referring to recent history of labor and community groups
> being really nasty to each other at a biomass forum].

> Nancy: Where we clash at [my economic justice organization] is around jobs –
> many of the jobs are temporary jobs.

> Jack: As long as we have capitalism, we're gonna be challenged to build an
> alternative economy. We can say to the electrician "you need to see that there's
> another world that people are building."

> Kathy: It's happening nationally [labor and community cooperation/organizing]

> Jack: We would be a conduit for the thinking that's going on.

> Harlan: It's the seeing part that's key.

> Jack: We are limiting our next concept of *High Road* to educator, not campaigner
> right?

> Kathy: We can leave that [campaigning] as an open possibility, but the focus
> should be on think and educate.

> Jack: We can be a catalyst. We can be a convener. If we see a hot topic we can
> convene outside the regular roundtable schedule. We need a staffer.

Kathy: We need people to feel that we are a credible convener. We've had great attendance and then also some roundtables where it's just us. There is a gap there. What people think *High Road* is, maybe because we don't [know]; which is why we're here today (Field Notes, August 2013).

For the main organizers of *High Road*, convening people to come together around a topic in order to advocate for green principles as outlined in their mission statement was closer to their goal than just having a conversation or a set of conversations about renewable energy or climate change per se. One of the problems, as Kathy mentions above, was that *High Road* did not have a lot of public visibility to give their intent to be conveners more clout. Another was the issue of funding, a problem addressed partially by becoming a non-profit entity that could now apply for grants, but not without a more clear vision of what the members wanted *High Road* to do; and not without some intensive grant writing, which was also predicated upon time that no one had. In the following conversation, members reflected on whether they thought it was worth continuing their efforts to sustain and continue *High Road* into the next year:

> Matt: *High Road* should continue because it could form a link between labor [and] community, worker safety. We need to make the public aware that we're not just a group for sustainable energy – we're more than that.
>
> Kathy: We're the broader definition of sustainable.
>
> Nancy: I think there's a need of groups getting together to talk. We need to do a better job of that. We need more attendance. There's no other group doing that – for Springfield anyway – unless it's for one campaign. It brings alternatives to the capitalist system out to people. We need to do a more targeted audience. Get a person-to-person commitment from groups to come.
>
> Kathy: I would say this: There have been times that I have felt – and maybe this has something to do with me being board president – "this is not worth my time" or "I have other work and this is not my priority" – for example, I was up until 11pm last night working. I think its value is bringing together labor and community groups. We're not doing a good enough job – as *members*. There's no other organization that does what we do in terms of educational forums. . . We

need to get to a level of a functioning organization that we have at least one person besides an intern involved, because I want it to be more than about convening roundtables (Field Notes, August 14, 2013).

The question of the roundtables straddled a notion that this was the best *High Road* could do for now with little to zero funding and staffing, and the notion that the roundtables were an important part of building conversations, convening stakeholders and building knowledge for future activism. For Jack, the way that *High Road* organizes discussions on specific themes like renewable energy is a way to build knowledge and networks in the service of creating a socially just green economy. At this August 2013 retreat, he suggested that one way to think of *High Road*'s work in the future is to tell funders that, "we are an educator of movement activists who are building a new economy." And for him, at least, having roundtables on renewable energies, technologies, and approaches is a way to educate movement activists (including *High Road* core members), to be able to be more strategic about creating a green economy that is socially just: "I don't want to get off-track about learning about biochar or bike transportation – we need to know that stuff to be economists."

While no one argued the value of the roundtables, frustration with remaining at the level of community, labor, and organizer education remained. For Sam, a student labor organizer at *Jobs with Justice*, the content on community solar, biochar, climate policy, transportation, and sustainable agriculture presented at *High Road* — and the discussions that ensued, might be ways to build local knowledge and networks, but they are also ways of diluting the conversation, because a broad base of support is not visibly being built by their efforts (Field Notes, April 25, 2012). For Kathy, the roundtables were not enough by themselves: "I get so frustrated at the end of these meetings because I just

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want to bring it to the next level.  I want to find some things that we can *do* with this information – like action steps" (January 23, 2013).

These interactions at *High Road*, which spanned six years of participant observation, revealed a persistent gap between discourse and action that frustrated *High Road* organizers as they sought to use the platform of integrating justice and sustainability to generate social and economic change. In the next section, I take a close look at the history and developing goals of *Democratic Energy*. Though very different in scope, *Democratic Energy* also struggled to connect the transformative discourses of sustainability and justice to effective action steps.

**Part Two: Democratic Energy**

**Democratic Energy Discourse: Social Justice and Alternative Economies**

*Democratic Energy*'s work and purpose was also closely linked to the concept of building a new green economy, and of tackling social injustice in tandem with unsustainable practices. The ways in which *Democratic Energy* formulated the connection between the goals of social justice and sustainability, and how that translated in terms of practical application on the ground were very different from *High Road.* Equitable access to resources and especially, equitable and democratic *participation* were central to *Democratic Energy*'s mission and vision of itself. Its discursive orientation encompassed the social justice and alternative economies discourses outlined in chapter 3; with a dash of systemic transformation discourse mixed in.

Ultimately, its impulse was to be part of a movement of change in the face of climate

change and its effects. It identified as a change maker in economic relations; in race and class relations; and in unsustainable energy production and consumption. On the ground, in its daily efforts, members, volunteers, and staff at *Democratic Energy* held fast to social justice principles, seeking to generate alternative economies, especially economies that promoted community-owned energy production, distribution, and consumption. As one staff member put it, "Our brand is social change. It's cause-related marketing" (Field Notes, February 16 2013).

The social justice component of its orientation presented the most difficulty in terms of collective agreement, awareness and clarity, however. Some members were well educated in environmental justice principles, while others wondered about the relevance of race and class justice to sustainability projects. It was challenging to make its products and services relevant, let alone accessible to low-income communities of color. Nevertheless, the leadership's interest in maintaining a social justice analysis and approach did not waver. This was especially clear in the mission of the organization, which stated: "*Democratic Energy* is a multi-class, multi-racial movement for a sustainable and just energy future." Changing power relations was central to Democratic Energy's goal, at the level of representation and participation in terms of race and class; and at the level of energy — in terms of changing inequitable systems of ownership, production, and traditional economic externalities. This systemic critique of power relations that encompassed both a critique of social relations (especially race and class), as well as a critique of material infrastructure (energy systems; ownership systems) was not always as easily understood by the many middle-class whites who participated as engineers, consumers, and project developers. In addition, the organization struggled to

manifest a membership that matched the race and class diversity of its intentions.

*Democratic Energy* was a business: it provided various products and services such as solar hot water heaters, oil buying groups, and energy audits. And, *Democratic Energy* was not merely a business. It was organized as a consumer-owned cooperative that espoused cooperative values, but was not a worker's cooperative. Its structure of operation included a well-paid CEO (earning upwards of $100,000 per year); a board of volunteer trustees; a staff of part-time and full-time field organizers, energy auditors, and outreach and education workers who were paid minimal salaries; and about 455 member-owners from New England and New York who were invited to shape the agenda, vote on new trustees, and make decisions about the organization's direction at annual meetings. *Democratic Energy* also served as a kind of locally owned clean energy center that facilitated educational events and leadership training events with grant monies; and it served as an incubator for small renewable energy projects and energy efficiency businesses.

*Democratic Energy* hosted leadership development retreats and sustainability summits; and it promoted and supported local energy initiatives through a system of local organizing councils that could draw on the organization for funding community-generated projects. One of the most successful of these projects was a biodiesel plant that was facilitated in large part by the Franklin County local organizing council. Planning for this project began in 2004, broke ground in 2011, and was slated to open for operations in 2015. More than ten years in the making, this project held fast to a commitment to be locally owned and locally funded, eschewing buy-outs from larger companies as well as

financial bankrolling that would compromise the locally owned and democratic thrust of the project. In fact, it was this project that brought *Democratic Energy* into existence.

**The History of Democratic Energy: Community Ownership of Renewable Energies**

As the CEO and Director of *Democratic Energy* tells it, *Democratic Energy* started as a result of a group of concerned local leaders, some of whom sat on energy committees in their towns, who came together to ask what kinds of energy communities could own and control in the face of an electricity industry that was about to deregulate, and in response to community interest in clean energy options. From its outset, the organization's purpose was to engage communities in locally owned renewable energy projects. People came together around the idea that it was feasible to create a biodiesel processing plant in western Massachusetts, and in 2004, *Democratic Energy* incorporated on the same day as a biodiesel company that was slated to create a local biodiesel processing plant, the first one in the region (Field Notes, November 23, 2013).

Member run, *Democratic Energy* started with about 250 members purchasing memberships that cost $975 each, in return for significant discounts on energy efficient and renewable energy products and services, participation in oil and propane buying groups, and the promise of financial and organizational assistance with local community energy projects. *Democratic Energy* began with three priorities: biodiesel, solar and energy efficiency. One of the first things it did was to become a partner in the biodiesel company which had grown out of the same community effort that had brought *Democratic Energy* into being. *Democratic Energy* was integrally involved in the imminent launch of the biodiesel plant, slated to open in June, 2015; having helped to

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finance, break ground, and construct a state-of-the-art processing plant.

**Working in the Community: Workspace and Interaction**

*Democratic Energy* shares office space with a local solar hot water company that it

counts as one of its largest investors, in a rural town on an industrial strip that includes

large stores selling medical supplies, bath and kitchen fixtures, wood stoves, and RVs.

The office houses staff who are responsible for the day-to-day running of the

organization. These employees field phone calls from prospective consumers who want

to install solar hot water through *Democratic Energy*'s *Neighbor to Neighbor* installation

program; or who want to join a propane or oil buying group to reduce their heating costs.

Staff organize sustainability summits, and facilitate conference calls between

geographically disparate members and organizers. They apply for green jobs training

grants and hire trainers to facilitate periodic green jobs trainings. They also project

marketing plans for biodiesel, and develop strategies for beefing up its products and

services department.

Most of the work volunteers and members of *Democratic Energy* perform does not take

place in this office, however. *Democratic Energy* brings members together in other

spaces — both for reasons of size as well as geographic proximity to the participants it

engages. For leadership development trainings, *Democratic Energy* rents private

conference centers and inns for weekend retreats that either include inexpensively catered

meals, or potluck meals prepared by participants themselves. Sustainability summits were

more public events, drawing hundreds of participants, so they always took place at a local

college or university. Local organizing council (LOC) meetings, where attendance ranged

from 3 to 15 people, took place in meeting rooms that were often offered in-kind by local Veterans of Foreign War buildings or food coops that were centrally located in the town or region represented by the council. In addition, *Democratic Energy* frequently tabled events at local conferences, fairs, and town events that featured sustainability issues, and reached out to communities by tabling at home shows, university housing fairs, and food coops in communities where they hoped to generate more interest. *Democratic Energy* moved through these spaces as both community nomad and traveling salesman— setting up camp in numerous community spaces in order to generate business, but especially to "rally the crowd" through conversation and relationship building — engaging in the hopeful, yet slow work of establishing more lasting connections in order to manifest its vision of community-owned sustainable energy.  As one board member put it:

> "we're not asking [people] to choose a product, but to change their behavior. What is it that will change people? What is the nugget?  Is it money, values, green, durability – that will make people say, "yes, I will change my behavior." – so [the work] has to be one-on-one – a half hour conversation here and there (Field Notes, February 16, 2013).

**Tensions Between Vision and Viability**

Partly because of its wide range of efforts, and partly because it was committed to member-run participation, *Democratic Energy* struggled with similar self-definition issues as *High Road*. It was difficult too, for newcomers and onlookers to understand what the organization was about at first-go, and it could take a while for people to understand how they might plug into *Democratic Energy*'s work. As a researcher for example, it took me a while to apprehend all of its facets. Its mission statement was what drew me to learn more. It was unclear, however, what it meant exactly, even after attending many different kinds of meetings that the organization facilitated and hosted.

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Part of this was a function of that fact that *Democratic Energy* was a moving target and changed its work depending upon the viability of any one of its projects. In the time that it took to get a biodiesel plant financed and constructed, for example, the biodiesel industry tanked and *Democratic Energy* had to put its energies into other ventures in order to remain viable, while still maintaining its commitment to the completion of the biodiesel plant. In addition, it took a while for me to understand the nature of *Democratic Energy*'s work in its entirety because of the spatial dispersion of its activities. At one point, after attending local organizing council meetings for about a year, for example, I was surprised to learn that the organization saw itself, among other things, as a small business incubator, having helped about five businesses get off the ground including an energy efficiency contracting company and a window insert company.

The director, who has been with the organization since its inception, characterized the process of *Democratic Energy* as one in which they are always asking the question: "where is the lever? What levers are there?" Having as one of its main operational approaches, a driving question that solicits vastly different answers based on the specific members who are convened; the current economic context; and the availability of state and municipal grants at the time it is asked, makes the organization vulnerable to the whims of a heady and swiftly changing combination of factors. It also puts the organization at a disadvantage in terms of community participation because, "The more questions there are, the more people walk away" (Field notes November 23, 2013). For some, the lack of clarity about how to do this work and where to find "the levers" that will enable this work to manifest is frustrating and confusing.  As one member who

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participated in *Democratic Energy* on and off for a number of years expressed: "I thought *Democratic Energy* was one thing, but now I don't know what it is" (Field notes August 10, 2012). This lack of clarity about what exactly the work constitutes makes initial contact with *Democratic Energy* somewhat confusing, and puts the organization at a disadvantage in terms of rallying interest, support, and participation.

At a leadership training in February of 2013, for example, during a session in which participants were asked to relay what drew them to *Democratic Energy*, I expressed how hard it had been for me to understand what exactly *Democratic Energy* was about. During the break, an older white woman representing a *Democratic Energy* local organizing council from Worcester approached me to share that she could "really relate" to what I said "about not understanding what *Democratic Energy* is doing – what it does." She revealed that when she was first interfacing with *Democratic Energy* she was not impressed. She felt like it was really white; that there was a lack of coherence and that she did not understand what it was trying to do. Upon further thought she added: "well maybe that's part of it – it just is this large tentacled beast that responds to the changing conditions around it in the interests of renewable energy and social justice" (Field Notes February 16, 2013). Because it doesn't have unlimited resources and needs to work with what is available in terms of human capital as well as funding sources, public and private, *Democratic Energy* takes many twists and turns. It is an entity that manages to survive as an organization between the interstices of two paradigms: 1. A business as usual system that it is trying to escape, but is still dependent on, and, 2. An emerging system that promises another world.

Bringing this large tentacled beast out for a jaunt in the community is no easy task. A story about tabling at a home show in a poor rural town west of Boston illustrates the complexity of communicating and enacting *Democratic Energy*'s goals to newcomers, and the way in which *Democratic Energy* is in a tight position between its vision and its capacity. In March of 2013, I joined Jim, a paid staff member who also facilitated the monthly local organizing council meetings I attended, in tabling a home show in a poor, white, and rural community in central Massachusetts. He told me that the goal for the day was to capture participants from the *National Grid* electric company to participate in the *Mass SAVE* program so that *Democratic Energy* could perform the resulting energy audits. He said *Democratic Energy* needed 50 *Mass SAVE* audits a month, adding that "right now, it's the energy audits that are keeping us afloat until we get the biodiesel company up and running." Performing 50 audits a month as a subcontractor for *Mass SAVE* meant that Jim and two other staff members were responsible for signing up about 15 to 20 people per week.

We stood outside at the entrance of a high school where the home show was taking place. We were one of three vendors set up outside — everyone else was tabling inside in the comfort of a heated space. Apparently, it cost more to secure an inside table, and *Democratic Energy* had been unable to secure a deal with the organizers that suited their budget. It was super cold outside and I was not well-dressed for outdoor tabling. Temperatures hovered slightly above freezing and attendees rushed from the parking lot through the door to get inside. Since our table was positioned right outside the entrance to the building, we tried to grab people's attention right before they sped into the building.

Our opener to every passerby was: "have you had an energy audit?" It was hard to connect with people who just wanted to get inside to the main home show. Inside, the mood was much more relaxed and people milled around slowly, getting information from different tables about local banks, local real estate companies, solar installers, oil delivery companies, and small local businesses. When people stopped in response to our query, we launched into asking if they had heard of the *Mass Save* Program, and explaining it further if they had not.

Our table, covered with a flower patterned table cloth, displayed a sample of biodiesel, some pamphlets about *Democratic Energy*, its solar hot water heaters, and its relationship to *Mass Save*, as well as a few copies of books that signaled the fact that *Democratic Energy* was not just another energy efficiency contractor, but part of "a movement for a sustainable and just energy future." These books included: *Power from the People: How to Organize, Finance and Launch Local Energy Projects* and *Local Dollars, Local Sense: How to Shift Your Money from Wall Street to Main Street and Achieve Prosperity*.

While we were getting organized, Jim mentioned that we might also talk to people about solar hot water, and he showed me a sample panel made by a local solar hot water heater company which he had propped up against the wall. He explained the technology – fluid is heated up to 120 degrees Fahrenheit through solar energy in a series of channels like a harp. Then the fluid is sent down from the roof through tubes to the basement to heat the water in the tank.

I reflected back that this was a lot to explain to folks – the biodiesel plant that was almost

up and running; the solar hot water installation opportunities; the alternative economic structures. Jim responded "yes, that's true; but think of *Home Depot* and all the things they provide under one branding statement: 'home improvement and construction products and services.'" Jim asserted that like *Home Depot*, *Democratic Energy* is doing a lot of things, but "it's not a buy-in opportunity – it's a participation opportunity." And pointing to the banner we had just hung from two stone pillars holding up the awning at the front of the building, he added, "our branding statement is 'community-owned sustainable energy'" (Field notes, March 16, 2013).

But this wasn't what we told passersby. After we successfully got their attention with the question "have you had a home energy assessment?," we would ask the question: "are you a homeowner or a renter?" Since only homeowners could sign up to have an energy audit done through *Mass SAVE*, this was immediately alienating to folks who were renters, and it served to put an abrupt stop to any conversation we might have had about renewable energy, in ironic contrast to *Democratic Energy*'s mission to be a multi-class, multi-racial movement for a just and sustainable future. Most people who lent us an ear only engaged with us because they wanted their home show map to be stamped for entry into a raffle for an iPad. Some people were contractors and were familiar with the *Mass SAVE* program as well as the energy efficiency methods we explained as central to the program. Many people were wary of our intentions, however, asking "you're not gonna push products on us are you? Some companies, you can't get them to leave."

Jim got a little discouraged, talking with an adjacent vendor about how hard it is to give

something away for free, adding "I think it's gonna be one of those days." We did end up

getting 40 people to sign up for free energy audits by the afternoon; the most successful

tabling I experienced, even at the expensive food coop we had tabled together a few

months earlier.  However, another one of Jim's reflections to me that day: "we have to act

like we're an energy services business, even though we're also doing other stuff,"

described the day more accurately than the discourse of systemic transformation

embedded in *Democratic Energy*'s mission statement. Market-based logic (in the form of

selling the service of a state program that would help Democratic Energy remain

profitable) drove the day, leaving me to wonder about the real tensions between market-

based exigencies and alternative visions of energy ownership (Field Notes, March 16,

2013).

**The Push and Pull of Systemic Transformation, Actionable Goals and Financial
Resources**

While tabling did not always offer an adequate space to communicate *Democratic*

*Energy*'s more profound visions, the leadership trainings provided a space for active

members and interested newcomers to hone their vision of a transformed world.

In February of 2012, I attended my first two-day leadership retreat for members of

*Democratic Energy*. It was held in a remote rural town in the hills of western

Massachusetts at a three-story round wooden house whose ground floor included an open

floor-plan with a view to two circular balconies on the above floors that housed bedrooms

and a central circular skylight at the very top. The space was decorated in a homey way

with a wide array of eclectic and decorative objects. A large quilt and a wooden

pendulum clock adorned the walls. Side tables dotted the perimeter of the room. The one near me was covered with a lace runner and held an antique samovar. A grand piano looked small in one corner of the vast space. A unicycle propped up against the wall and an old chest filled with hats invited play, while a string of multicolor lights created extra warmth to the open floor plan.

At the start of the retreat, about 30 participants sat in a large circle of chairs listening to the facilitator, Martin, a Latino labor organizer from New York who was friends with the CEO and director of *Democratic Energy*, Alice, a white woman. Visually and contextually from people's brief introductions, I noted eleven white women, seven white men, two black men, three Latino men and two Latina women in the room.

The goal for the weekend was to develop a roadmap for the internal structure and core activities that could shape *Democratic Energy*'s local organizing councils. The local organizing councils each raise capital from member investments and invest this capital in energy projects of their own choosing. As described earlier, the local organizing councils constitute a structural and procedural system that signals *Democratic Energy*'s commitment to developing community-owned and initiated energy projects using local resources and expertise, while holding fast to a democratic decision-making model. While the overall logic of the system is clear, the possibilities for each council are not always so clear. Especially mind-boggling are the different possibilities for energy projects based on different demographics – renters versus homeowners for instance – or different state incentive programs like *Mass Save* which has no counterpart in Vermont and Rhode Island, each of which also have their own local organizing councils.

The people who were present at the leadership development training that weekend included those who were looking for a new vision, and people who had already done something exciting that others could replicate or participate in. Weekend participants included organizers who had already experienced success starting up the biodiesel plant that was almost up and running; and those who were in the midst of developing a local energy efficiency business that trained and hired low-income youth of color. The group also included folks who wanted to do something in their local organizing council, and who were either in the beginning stages of exploring the possibilities, or in a frustrated stage of feeling as if they did not know exactly where to apply themselves, especially with inconsistent attendance at many of the council meetings.

Basing the work for the day on a road map for community organizing that is used in trainings with labor organizers, the facilitator began by urging participants to think about what their local organizing councils wanted to do to "move you, in your case, to a vision of a just and sustainable community;" and what kind of internal development was necessary to carry out these potential activities. He instructed the group to enumerate "your short list of core activities that help move you toward just and sustainable communities," and to think about the capacities necessary to get there.

At this introduction, there was visible discomfort in the room. The following play-by-play shows that at least some members were not yet ready to enumerate the activities their LOC could engage in because they were still in the process of developing their vision and understanding their goals, even just in terms of what was meant by sustainability. There is a tension between needing to formulate a process, and not

knowing where one is going because it is so new:

> *Member:* My question and concern is that we're still in the early stages of development.

> *Martin:* We're going to set up three teams to practice talking about activities and capacity.

> *Member:* So it's fake? We're just practicing?

> *Martin:* The first team will talk about activities – they will be the impact group. The second team will talk about internal development and the third team will be agenda driving.

> *Member:* Are we speculating? Or are we focusing on what the groups already have?

> *Martin:* . . . To identify what the local organizing councils are capable of, interview people and ask them: 1. "what do we want to be able to do that would change our community in terms of sustainability? And 2, "what kind of capacity do we have, to be able to do that?"

> *Member:* How do you define sustainability?

> *Martin:* [making the choice to ignore this request for backing up to define terms and to move the group to a workshop session]: Create two lines like speed dating (Field Notes, February 4, 2012).

Despite the voiced confusion, and even resistance to moving forward just yet, Martin, the facilitator moved on, and led the group to create two lines of chairs facing each other. People took their seats, each facing pair asking each other what they wanted to do to change their community and what kind of capacity they felt they had to do that. After a few minutes, the people in one of the two rows of chairs were directed by the facilitator to move over one seat to ask the same questions in a new pair.

While this exercise began as a way to be more specific about what kinds of activities the local organizing councils could engage in that would further the goals of *Democratic Energy*'s vision to create a multi-class, multi-racial movement for a just and sustainable

future, the actual exercise called forth very general and vague visions such as: "getting people together by sharing ownership in a clean and sustainable economy;" and "we could make our own clothes and take care of our own healthcare." People waxed philosophic about human nature: "Scarcity creates self-centeredness. It prevents people from being conscious about the environment and community which should be higher priorities;" and focused on the problem of LOC attendance: "At the local level, we need to get 160 members more involved. Three people doesn't cut it. In [our] county we have no members. How do you get new members?" (Field Notes, February 4, 2012).

The group seemed to teeter between the transformative discourse of a just and sustainable future; the need for concrete goals, and the difficulty of knowing exactly what was feasible or how to exercise imagination in coming up with concrete goals that might match a greater transformative vision. Just like at *High Road*, this weekend showed how much people in these organizations struggle to move forward.

A large group conversation after lunch revealed a real back and forth between lofty visions, the need for actionable goals, and the difficulty of bridging effectively between vision and action steps:

> *Member 1*: Vision without practical application is just talk.
>
> *Member 2*: We need concrete goals. Specifics are not always transformative. The endpoint of justice and sustainability is vague.
>
> *Martin:* A question for the group is what specifically, from a local organizing council vision, will we be capable of doing to transform our communities?
>
> *Member 3:* I'm stuck on "transforming our communities" – what does that even mean? (Field Notes, February 4, 2012).

Despite this vague and disjointed beginning, as the day progressed, the group was able to

formulate some general activities that it felt should constitute the core activities of any local organizing council. These included outreach and education, coalition building, green jobs development and products and services development. Though these activities were still broad in scope, they were an important step towards more actionable goal-setting than earlier philosophical musings about what a sustainable future might look like from a utopian point of view that emerged in the speed dating exercise.

Martin probed the group to specify their goals still further, and the discussion that ensued heightened the tension between vision and capacity; as well as the imperative to remain financially viable with the desire to create something that was new and potentially transformative. One member commented, "the core businesses are driving our efforts right now," while another specified: "outreach and education and developing ownership through participation are core activities of *Democratic Energy*." Two other members tried to parse the difference between the need to make money through business development schemes and the desire to change people through education and outreach. One member asserted, "we have to balance our revenue stream activities and other activities;" while another suggested that education on the one hand, and revenue generating business on the other, did not have to be mutually exclusive by offering: "education and outreach can provide a revenue stream through foundation money."

As the room tensed around the idea of having to choose one or two activities over one another, Alice, the director of *Democratic Energy* chimed in: "part of the reason *Democratic Energy* is challenging is that you can't leave things off the list. If you leave off community organizing or public policy advocacy – it's not cross-race or cross-class."

As the time allotment for this discussion came to its end, Martin wrapped up in a somewhat unsatisfactory way by recommending a monograph called "Good to Great for the Social Sector," emphasizing that *Democratic Energy* spend some time on its brand clarity so that people can have a clear sense of "this is what we do" (Field Notes, February 4, 2012).

While the group had a good sense of its skills needs, citing business, technical, and green job training expertise, community capital and community organizing skills as key to supporting the internal capacity of local organizing councils; the application of a transformative vision remained the sticky enterprise. As one member put it toward the end of the weekend: "I don't think we're very good at this yet as an organization – to develop the capacity to come up with something specific to transform community."

Financial viability kept rearing its head as fundamental to this process. As one member expressed: "if you don't have a vision you won't find the money." But the relationship between funding and the implementation of vision was not considered to be merely a one-way relationship, as revealed by another member who retorted, "if you don't have a practical way to implement it [your vision], you'll never find the money" (Field Notes, February 4, 2012).

While *Democratic Energy* was built on a model of community-owned sustainable energy, and while it had some successful projects under its belt, it was also committed to a democratic process to invite new perspectives and formulate new visions. It offered new models at the same time as it was trying to develop better models through a collective democratic process. For newcomers especially, the democratic process of collective

envisioning represented a frustrating process of talk in a landscape of unclear

possibilities. For others, *Democratic Energy* led the way to a better future by showing

people how to get there. As one organizer, an African American member from New

York put it in a testimonial on *Democratic Energy's* website:

> "Part of my perspective is that you have to be able to *show* people a future. You
> can't just *talk* people into a new future. I've never believed that in terms of – as an
> organizer, and I believe it even less now at this point in my life. To me, people
> learn things from what they see is possible. So that's why I work for things like
> *Democratic Energy*. I think we have to show it, at the same time as we're
> reducing all the obstacles that are in the way of being able to do something
> progressive and just." (*Democratic Energy* website, Fall 2012).

The leadership training of this particular weekend in February of 2012 revealed that even

while being advised to be specific in the process of envisioning sustainable and just

community, landing is hard. There is a rather large leap from ideology and imagination to

concrete plans and strategies. And not surprisingly, what can be imagined is linked

heavily to resources and to demographics in terms of the relative advantage and

disadvantage people incur in their social positions. One of the conversations has to

include available resources – conceived broadly in terms that don't just include money,

but policy, loopholes, ownership, skills, partnership, and time. As Carl Anthony stated at

a Sustainability Conference that *Democratic Energy* organized, "The question of

sustainability is linked with resources and access to resources" (Field Notes, June 2008).


To sum up, *Democratic Energy* engaged in some fruitful and inspiring sustainability

efforts, such as their green jobs training program and the community generated

development of a local biodiesel plant. Of the three organizations, it was arguably the

most successful at manifesting its vision into effective action. *Democratic Energy*'s

commitment to community involvement and democratic decision-making was also impressive. At the same time, resource pressures put a strain on the organization. It struggled to sustain the ongoing participation of older members, and to inspire new members to join and participate. It proved difficult for *Democratic Energy* to ensure that the link between its vision of sustainability and justice and its activity remained strong.

In the next section, I give one last empirical account. This one is about *Green Net*, the third organization that acted as a case study of emerging green publics in the Pioneer Valley.

**Part Three: Green Net**

**Green Net Discourse: Green Economy and Sustainable Capitalism**

*Green Net* provided an interesting contrast to both *High Road* and *Democratic Energy*. It was started by a local contractor, Scott, whose own contracting company specialized in deep energy retrofits of residential and commercial buildings. A white man in his thirties, Scott was an engaged leader who was well liked by a number of people who attended *Green Net*'s events regularly. When people talked about him, they raved. As one participant said,

> "he is a creative thinker who is taking old houses and making energy efficiency work. It is a real puzzle to figure out. He's a visionary. He is inspiring. He really cares about climate change" (Field Notes, February 13, 2013).

Scott's vision was both market oriented as well as community centered, driven by a commitment to clean energy and energy efficiency in the context of climate change. He spoke in a charismatic way, rallying the crowd with an impassioned voice and the occasional "whoop," saying things like:

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"At the end of the day all the jobs can be green if we work on understanding what sustainability is and can be. We can take each of the jobs we have and put them to the test of sustainability. How do we make all of our jobs green? We should be able to look to our jobs and say, 'I'm feeling good about the community I live in'" (Field Notes, November 9, 2011).

At the same time as community was central to the idea behind *Green Net*, its vision of sustainability kept a discourse of market logic firmly on the table: "We're looking for ideas for how to take it to the next level – on how to make it more sustainable: people, planet, profit" (Field Notes, January 11, 2012). This organization and its projects fit more squarely into the discourse of green capitalism, relegating discourses of social justice and alternative economies to the margins of its efforts.

While this organization's primary goal was to foster a local market for energy efficiency and renewable energy products and services, especially in the area of green building, the mission statement of the organization included a nod to the justice and sustainability discourse: "*Green Net* believes the development of a just and sustainable economy requires the participation of community members from all sectors and income levels." Its commitment to social justice was lukewarm however, the most distant of my three field sites from the environmental justice principles outlined in Van Jones' formulation of the green economy. And the social space it created was the most male centric out of the three organizations I studied.

**Structure, Space, and Interaction**

The network of local people involved in sustainability was highly visible here, reflected by its monthly attendance, as well as by a long list of founding members that included individuals as well as small businesses — especially those in the building trades —

community colleges, employment boards, and regional sustainability associations. *Democratic Energy* is listed as one of the founders, as are some of *Democratic Energy*'s business partners, including the biodiesel plant and the energy efficiency company it helped to incubate. Members of *High Road* did not, to my knowledge, attend *Green Net* events during the time I was in the field; though members and participants of *Green Net* did present and attend *High Road* events.

*Green Net* encompassed two different programs. One was *Green Drinks* and the other was Building Retrofit. *Green Drinks* is an international phenomenon that began in London. It is "an organic, self-organizing network" in which people from all sectors who are interested in the environment meet at local restaurants or bars to network and "inspire" each other, which is certainly how Scott envisioned *Green Net*. To be designated as a local *Green Drinks* participant, any local *Green Drinks* group has to abide by the international *Green Drinks* code which includes meeting regularly (mostly once a month) in a public space, being nonprofit, practicing open-participation, and being agenda-free. The international website insists that, "*Green Drinks* as an entity will never endorse or have a position or stance on an environmental topic;" and allows that "It's OK to have speakers for 20-30 mins or so or to have a theme for the evening to help stimulate discussion, but the bulk of the evening should be free form and random" (Green Drinks International). This presumed neutrality shaped the space as one that tended towards a more dominant "green capitalism" perspective, even as attendees ranged in political perspectives, and at least one core participant was very committed to a systemic transformation approach.

*Green Net* followed the international format mandated by *Green Drinks International* quite closely, organizing public gatherings at a local brewery that were often preceded by presentations about local community college certificate programs; ways to network in the green economy; municipal and state programs that could help fund retrofitting projects; recycling methods; heat and hot water technologies; climate change science; and job searching skills. True to the international *Green Drinks* code, the presentations and gatherings were apolitical in tone, with facilitators emphasizing that they wanted people to get to know each other, share information "and we always want to have a good time doing it" (Field Notes, December 14, 2011).

The other one of *Green Net*'s projects, Building Retrofit, was conceived by Scott as an educational and marketing project through which to make green building practices mainstream in the building industry. One of the ways this translated was to get information out to businesses to encourage them to retrofit their buildings. The brewery where *Green Net* met for example, had just completed a deep retrofit from which they were saving $35,000 in energy costs, resulting in a pay back period of seven years on their investment (Field Notes May 9, 2012). The space served as an immediate example of financial and "feel good" reasons for business owners in the room to consider retrofitting their own buildings.

Building Retrofit held several annual charrettes and barbecues, bringing people together to collaborate on envisioning ways to address local and national barriers to homeowner and business retrofits. Scott described this as an energy efficiency marketing arrangement that is community based. His emphasis was on drawing from the community to

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participate in and collaborate in problem solving barriers such as information access, financing, and skilled green builders (Field Notes, December 14, 2011). Building Retrofit drew heavily from a White House 2009 report called "Recovery Through Retrofit" to create a conceptual road map "for stimulating local market demand and information saturation in the Pioneer Valley region and beyond" (Field Notes, Feb 25, 2012).

**Evolving Visions: Building Community, Sharing Information**

As time passed, the main founder, Scott, fell ill with Lyme's disease (ironically, a disease that is becoming more prevalent due to climate change), and could no longer keep up his charismatic leadership of the organization. A few of the other founders got together to talk about how to keep this organization afloat and decided to incorporate it as a non-profit in order to be able to obtain more funding and to be able to have a board of directors who could share the load of planning and organizing. In February 2013, *Green Net* met in its new incarnation at a different location, a local hotel and conference center with a meeting area as well as a restaurant that could accommodate presentations as well as the *Green Drinks* networking approach. Two of the five people on its board were employees and board members of *Democratic Energy*, and one had presented at *High Road*, an indication of the tight threads of connection between organizations and individuals interested in sustainability work in the area. Out of five new board members, four were women, all white except for one woman of color who had worked with Scott on *Green Net* for many years.

In its new incarnation, the new leaders of *Green Net* emphasized that their main goal moving forward was to "keep green night going," while being open to growing: "if we

have more energy and ideas for more projects we can bring it to the board. There's a lot

of room to grow." At the same time, the new leaders emphasized their intention to be

realistic: "we're not going to promise to be somewhere we're not — were an all-

volunteer group." And while continuing green night (which was essentially the *Green*

*Drinks* part of the mission) became the purpose that could be brought forward within the

constraints of a volunteer board and minimal funding, the emphasis was on the role of the

community in shaping its direction and energy. At the introduction to its new structure as

a non-profit, the president of the board encouraged the attending participants to ask the

question: "Is there a role I want to have to build this community?" (Field Notes, February

13, 2013). This is a question that drives *Democratic Energy*'s advances toward public

participation in its quest to create community-owned renewable energy, and a just and

sustainable future. Likewise, it is a question that surfaces in *High Road* as well, in terms

of its goal of bringing community organizations and citizens together to advocate for an

inclusive economy that protects workers' rights.

*Green Net* was the most public in nature of the three organizations whose events and

meetings I regularly attended for this ethnography. And while the people in its leadership

were very business oriented, the meetings drew a range of participants besides the small

business crowd: retirees who wanted to see how they could be involved; unemployed

people looking for a job; students sent by professors at local sustainability programs;

municipal workers; academics; and local activists who made announcements about anti-

nuclear campaigns and transition town movements.

*Green Net* devoted part of its sessions to community announcements and these ran the

gamut from political ways to get involved in climate action, to announcements for

renewable energy product fairs and academic conferences. At one monthly gathering for

example, the announcements section included the following:

> Participant 1: "besides going to Washington DC to show the administration how important it is to address climate change and the Keystone Pipeline, 350.org has a great website. If you can't be there, it lists what you can do.  There are all sorts of things to help people pay attention – that they know this is a critical time."

> Participant 2: [My organization] is holding a Business Networking Event and on April 16 and 17, Judy Wicks from White Dog Café is talking about her new book – it's very inspiring.

> Participant 3: [My town] is holding a Transition Town meeting Wed night at [my local] Library.

> Participant 4: [My organization] will be hosting a building energy conference. WMECO (a utility company) is providing free buses. Our Trade show floor is our gateway drug.

> Participant 5: I'm writing a book interviewing climate leaders. And there's a Biochar Conference at UMASS tomorrow (Field Notes, February 13, 2013).

Like *Democratic Energy* and *High Road*, *Green Net* drew participants with a range of

motivations. Some came looking for work, networking with prospective employers.

Others came looking to network their products, and especially, their services, as builders,

insulation workers, and solar installers. Still others were motivated by change. Green Net

drew from the largest net of participants, and at the same time, its focus was the most

politically mainstream. As an organization, it did not provide a platform for change as

much as a site for business networking and the marketing of energy efficiency in the

building trades. This was true despite membership by individuals who were there seeking

transformative change. For example, Greta, a regular at *Green Net* emphasized that

organizing for sustainable and green careers was "not just about sales and money, but real

change." She expressed to me in conversation one day: "We're all on the crest of a wave

– it's about climate change, global warming, erratic weather patterns, the future of our planet. It's a time we can get creative about the future" (Field Notes, July 31, 2012).

*Green Net* began with two goals that were opposite in scope and breadth: 1. a narrow focus on generating interest in retrofits and 2. A wide goal of bringing together anyone interested in networking for sustainability. An economy that did not take off as quickly as predicted stalled the development of a secure foothold in marketing energy efficiency to the community. When the organization incorporated, it retained this goal, but subsumed it under the larger goal of providing an educational and networking space for anyone interested in sustainability. Social justice never made it to the finish line, despite initial uses of the world "just" in connection with the word "sustainability." The newly minted non-profit continued to offer monthly presentations on sustainability that were stripped down of any organizational intent to articulate notions of social justice as central to visions of sustainability.

As an organization, *Green Net* experienced the least tension between discourse and action. In part, this was because it emphasized energy efficiency and conservation in its approach to sustainability. In part, it was due to the fact that its main goal was to facilitate networking around issues of sustainability without engaging any political goals per se. *Green Net* rarely broached the issue of justice, and that fact characterized it more along the lines of Jamison's dominant approach to climate change than the emergent approach which underscores the centrality of justice to sustainability. The issue of agency did come up as a tension during some of the presentations, and among its members, however, including the agency to deepen the discourse itself. This was evident, for example,

during an informal conversation I had with one participant who implied that he wanted more from these gatherings, as he expressed that *Green Net*'s presentations were "speaking to the choir." In chapters 5 and 6, I will say more about the ways that agency in emerging green publics was constrained in this setting and others by other dynamics such as the production of knowledge and the structure of publics.

**The Just Sustainability Disconnect**

Scholar Alison Alkon defines *just sustainability* as a continuum between a strictly environmental framework for sustainability, and a framework of sustainability that fully integrates environmentalism and justice. For the most part, *High Road* and *Democratic Energy* and the network of concerned citizens and activists in this study locate themselves on a just sustainability continuum, especially in terms of their stated goals. Local activity in these organizations engages the connection between sustainability and justice with the intention of producing social, economic, and systemic change.

As is evident in the ethnographic data presented in this chapter, in the main, organizations expressed an ongoing commitment to integrating justice with sustainability that mirrors the national discourse put forth by leaders such as Van Jones and Carl Anthony. *Democratic Energy* was most successful at engaging this connection between sustainability and justice at the level of citizen's rights to own locally produced energy, and at the level of democratic participation. *High Road* most successfully integrated sustainability and justice in terms of centering worker's rights to organize. It consistently challenged local stakeholders to address labor rights. As Jack asserted, "Everybody needs to be challenged on labor." At the same time, these organizations struggled to move

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forward with these orientations.

It is challenging, in the context of a pervading logic of capitalism, and in the face of market and state constraints, to find ways to actually enact justice -- to integrate justice and sustainability in the face of systems of injustice that shape every aspect of the infrastructure. It is inevitable perhaps, that it is difficult for organizations to find footholds that can shape lasting change. Given the constraints, it is impressive how *Democratic Energy* manages to stay afloat, and still stake a claim to participatory justice through democratically organized and locally owned energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. It is also impressive how long *High Road* has managed to keep advocacy for labor rights in the conversation and provide a space where local people can get educated on sustainability issues while keeping a perspective that integrates justice and sustainability on the table. The field data discussed in this chapter reveals that a green public with justice and sustainability goals is emerging, however, it is also very fragile. It is dependent upon the very structures it seeks to undermine; and it is consistently flawed in terms of its own goals, especially as concerns multi-race and multi-class leadership and representation.

*Democratic Energy* emphasized the importance of being a multiracial and multi-class organization to realize a mission in which justice is integral to sustainability. In practice however, it relied heavily on a middle- and upper-class white membership that was more interested in clean energy goals than social justice goals per se. And while its membership included a few active organizers of color, the whiteness of its staff, and the location of its headquarters in a predominantly white rural community, undermined its

commitment to racial justice. *High Road* included the notion of making the green economy accountable to communities of color in its principles, but in terms of everyday practice, it relied mostly on one Latino member to carry the torch of multiracial leadership, such that when he was absent from meetings, this priority was largely left by the wayside in discussions involving organizing strategies and best practices.

In an article on the rise of the environmental justice paradigm in environmentalist movements over the decade from 1990 to 2000, Dorceta Taylor observes that, ". . . the environmental justice frame not only recognizes environmental injustice as it relates to humans harming nature, but it also recognizes that environmental injustice arises from racial, gender, and class discrimination" (Taylor 2000, 523). It seems that despite the fact that the environmental justice paradigm is present in local movements of sustainability and justice, the relatively privileged social location of the individuals coming up with new visions on the ground makes for a discourse that is actually very thin on racial justice analysis. While there is agreement that "environmental injustice relates to humans harming nature," many people in local movements are not as clear about the ways in which environmental injustice arises from racial, gender, and class discrimination. Moreover, there is not a strong sense that environmental injustice is also maintained and perpetuated through race, class and gender discrimination, even through local efforts to be sustainable and just. In addition, where race and class are "seen" and underscored — they are treated as relatively distinct vectors of discrimination — not as integral processes to environmental injustice, and by extension, environmental justice.

In 2008, at a Sustainability Summit organized by *Democratic Energy* events I attended,

environmental justice advocate and scholar, Carl Anthony gave conference attendees advice about how to "ground" the new discursive orientation of the intersection of sustainability and justice. One way was through multiracial leadership and the other was to build community:

> "If we're going to make a transition to sustainability, we have to bring in justice. It's not peripheral, it's mainstream. . . The next step that needs to be taken is multiracial, multicultural leadership. . . We need to build the conversation. We need to build community" (Field Notes, June 2008).

Organizations and individuals in the local network were most successful at Anthony's second suggestion about how to ground the work of integrating sustainability and justice: that of "building the conversation" and "building community." All three organizations discussed in this chapter created spaces for community members to gather and put their heads together to envision and discuss sustainability projects and solutions to climate change. Although democratic participation and procedural justice practices were engaged by these groups as a way to foster dialogue and strengthen sustainability networks, the nature of this participation reproduced many inequalities.

Bringing people together to tackle the issues is never a neutral process. Without effectively building multicultural leadership, local organizations reproduced the geographic and economic race and class segregation in the region, and left "the conversation" vulnerable to producing very limited options and imperatives for change. In addition, most of the people making decisions about green jobs organizing; about which grants to apply for; about policy advocacy; and business development -- are people who are doing so in their role as workforce development managers, union leaders, business owners, and municipal leaders. Communities are either absent from this process

or are subsumed in what is really a professional class of laborers trying to think through a new green economy in their positions – not merely as citizens, but as energy auditors, municipal employees, green construction workers, community college leaders, and energy company contractors. In chapter 6, I take a look at what kinds of publics are emerging out of this local climate change organizing, focusing on the ways that these processes are equitable and inequitable.

There is another resource that organizers and activists have more control over, and that is the site of knowledge production. As with any discourse, the discourse of justice and sustainability is producing knowledge. It was striking how much of the activity on the ground represented engagements in knowledge sharing and knowledge seeking. As some have pointed out, seeking knowledge is a key component of creating environmental citizenship (Luque 2007). In the next chapter, I turn to a consideration of the role of knowledge construction in local movements for justice and sustainability.

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[1] Leon marshaled considerable resources as a workforce development manager. He came to High Road meetings to network with community groups and potential employers in order to prepare for writing Pathways out of Poverty grants. In December 2008, he organized a Green Workforce Development Forum that took place at a business center at a local community college. About 40 people were in attendance, representing community and municipal groups, and community colleges. The agenda for the meeting was to recommend a direction for applying for a Pathways Out of Poverty grant. Leon spoke about the role of the regional employment board as a convener in the community and that its goals were to align the available state resources in partnership with community organizations so that people who need to break out of poverty could receive the training and education they needed to get jobs. For Leon, the imminent green economy inspired two questions:

      1.where are the opportunities for investment?
      2. where are the opportunities for jobs?

He spearheaded a grant that was submitted in January 2009, one month after this forum. In April 2009, the Regional Employment Board Leon represented secured a $200,000 Massachusetts PoP grant to provide training in solar boiler installation, energy auditing, and weatherization.

**CHAPTER 5**
**KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION**

**<u>Introduction</u>**

Discourse, as the literature teaches us, shapes knowledge production and knowledge

systems, what Foucault called epistemes (Foucault 1972; 2010), and other theorists call

epistemology. Discourse is a process in which social actors "struggle over ways of

making sense of social existence" (Steinberg 1993). In and through this struggle,

discourse structures knowledge domains (Keller 2011) and ". . .defines and produces the

objects of our knowledge" (Hall 1997). Discursive practices then, are intricately tied up

with knowledge practices. How we make sense of something shapes how we know it to

be. It shapes what we think we know; what we think we need to know; and what we think

others should know. One way to look at discourses of sustainability, climate change,

environmental justice, and social justice is as efforts to produce new forms of knowledge.

These emerging discourses are pushing the envelope about what we think we know and

need to know, thereby also informing what people think needs to change in terms of a

whole host of systems and processes: economics, consumption, energy systems,

environmental politics, transportation etc.

I draw from the perspective of social theorists such as Jamison, who conceptualize social

movements "as processes of political protest that mobilize human, material, and cultural

resources in networks linking individual actors and organizations together in pursuit of a

common cause. They provide spaces in the broader culture for new forms of knowledge

making and socio-cultural learning as a central part of their activity." (Jamison 2010:

813). While the climate change activity in this ethnography was not always founded in

political protest, a central activity of the organizations and individuals that I studied was to construct public spaces and public events in which knowledge could be shared, disseminated, and co-produced with the purpose of motivating social and systemic change.

Education is a key mediating practice and bridging structure in processes of social change (Emirbayer and Sheller 1998). I am inspired here too by Latour's question about what methods are being used to "represent" the issues to be tackled. Education and knowledge building were key methods used to "represent" or construct meaning about sustainability and justice in the organizing I observed. Much of the local activity in the face of climate change is structured by expressly educational activities of one kind or another: teach-ins, roundtables, conferences, panels, power points, and trainings. Many organizers see education as central to their own development and to that of others in their communities as justice and sustainability leaders. And many feel like they need this information before they can act. One organizer at *Democratic Energy* for example, expressed it this way:

> "Knowledge is power. . . We have to educate ourselves. Then we can educate others and become citizen-activists who can mobilize others so we can activate change" (Field Notes Sept 28, 2013).

In this chapter, I explore what kind of relationship local actors in sustainability and justice have to knowledge — in substantive terms and in terms of practice. Which kinds of knowledge were sought out and distributed? What kind of practices did people engage in to share and co-create knowledge? What can be said about the pedagogies of activism present here?

This chapter is based on several assumptions. One is that more than other movements,

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socially just climate change organizing requires an overwhelming amount of knowledge. Whereas all movements require knowledge and use education, training, and consciousness raising as mediums through which to facilitate change; socially just climate change organizing depends on a foundation of knowledge that ranges from very specific technical and scientific knowledge about solar panels and wind technology for example; to an understanding of economic, municipal, and legal systems such as alternative economics, fossil fuel politics, state grants, and community land use; to a sociological awareness of the ways in which these processes and structures are shaped by power relations such as race, class and gender.

Another assumption upon which this chapter rests is that in order to come up with strategies to enact a vision of sustainability and justice, there is a need for knowledge that is not widely had; that takes time to disseminate and co-create; and that involves choices (that themselves have political consequences) about which kind of knowledge to focus on, and what kinds of knowledge practices to engage in. Between the discourse of sustainability and justice, and the ability to find footings for social change sit the production and communication of knowledge.

Lastly, like Foucault and others have shown so astutely, knowledge is something that is socially constructed and politically contested. It is not a truth waiting to be discovered, and its purpose is what fuels its construction and meanings.

I argue that the gap between transformative discourses and the ability to find lasting footholds that I discuss in chapter 4 is partly produced by tensions in approaches to

knowledge. The emerging discursive formations of sustainability and justice call forth new forms of knowledge that have not quite been produced yet. An episteme is emerging at the same time as ways of talking about it are. While a relatively new discourse is appealing to a new way of being (upon which the planet's survival depends, no less); knowledge practices are churned out of older discursive formations that do not always reflect, or match emerging sustainability and justice paradigms. For example, sometimes positivist approaches to science (which place exclusive value on the discovery of objective facts as removed from context) still extend an authoritative claim over epistemic validity that forecloses the space for alternative knowledges to provide meaning and solutions to planetary crises. Examples in this chapter will elaborate on this.

The local interactions that take place in response to climate change consist of orientations to knowledge seeking and knowledge production that include imagining new ways of being, as well as assessing what possibilities already exist. In order to enact a vision, one has to know what the possibilities are, and believe that they are in fact, possible, or worth an effort at making possible. In order to know what the possibilities are, one has to be educated in political alternatives, economic alternatives, and technological and scientific alternatives.

As a result, a lot of the "emergent" work that local actors and organizations are engaged in is finding out more about new social forms such as worker cooperative structures and solidarity economy models; as well as about technical and policy options such as solar panel technology, state incentives for energy efficiency, and clean energy options for residential and commercial buildings. A large part of the work then, is 1. a collective

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process of envisioning that involves communicating different social and political frameworks such as "smart growth policies" or "the solidarity economy"; and 2. a collective process of information gathering that includes understanding climate science, clean energy technologies, financing avenues, and state programs as they already exist.

These two aspects to knowledge production I observed have ontological and technical qualities. Knowledge production in sustainability and justice is ontological by virtue of the fact that the social interaction that inheres in the roundtables, conferences, teach-ins, and leadership trainings is premised upon the idea that another world is possible, or that another world is necessary for our very survival. And as explored in chapter 4, these ontological motivations (which are apparent in and through the discursive formations of justice and sustainability) were articulated from different and sometimes contesting perspectives: as high road economics; multi-race and multi-class movements for justice; community ownership of renewable energy; and market-based approaches to the implementation of clean energy infrastructures. As Chesters notes in an article on social movements and the ethics of knowledge production, "ontology comes first" (Chesters 2012: 147).

The knowledge production that occurs in these spaces is also technical and practical because communities, individuals, and the organizations that provide a vehicle for this interaction, are exploring the efficacy and possibility of specific political, economic, and social approaches that run the gamut from exploring cooperative economic structures to food policies, transportation changes, government programs, and community solar installations. People are also exploring specific technologies and tools such as solar

heating, weatherization techniques, small hydro-power turbines, and residential chicken coops.

In this chapter, I will show that there was a prevailing tension between different approaches to knowledge: 1.the didactic dissemination of discrete packages of knowledge and 2. a loosely operating notion that we were all engaged in a project of co-producing knowledge that could also lead to further action steps. Emphasis on expert knowledge and the legitimacy of expert presenters often put a brake on the transformative potential embedded in the discourse of justice and sustainability. On the one hand, knowledge seeking activities enable public spirited talk that is essential to a robust democratic approach to justice and sustainability (Eliasoph). Question and answer sessions after panels and presentations for example, engaged audiences and participants. On the other hand, much of the form that knowledge sharing takes is vulnerable to shutting down conversation and the social interaction necessary to shape a new public. Calling on experts to present packaged knowledge promotes an efficiency of information sharing, yet it often served to foreclose the productive potential of collective engagement. These interactions emphasized the technical aspects of knowledge over the political potential of collective knowledge building. Didactic knowledge dissemination often took priority over dialogue and community building, despite an intention to convene and involve communities in collectively building a road map to a just and sustainable future. At the same time, meetings that did privilege dialogue over information-sharing floundered around the need for more knowledge – dialogue became difficult because participants needed more discrete, concrete knowledge to be able to move forward.

What is so complicated about local activity on the ground is that multiple discourses shape different ways of knowing in the same room, at the same conferences, at the same tables, and of course, across events. The main discursive frameworks of each organization did help shape the kinds of knowledge production that occurred, however, they also struggled with a lack of clarity about the uses of knowledge, and a lack of shared vision among their members. This chapter considers whether deliberately strategizing about knowledge practices and the uses of knowledge could be a tool to address the frustrations many local actors had that it was difficult to move "the conversation" forward.

**The Uses of Expert Knowledge**

*Democratic Energy*, *Green Net* and *High Road* each engaged in knowledge practices where people were invited to present at panels, teach-ins, roundtables, and sustainability summits. Partly because of the disparate nature of the topics and the fact that they involved different kinds of expertise, language, and training that were not shared by the majority of members attending any one of the events, the way this knowledge was shared tended to emphasize the expertise of one or more presenters, treating the knowledge conveyed in the presentations as packaged entities for consumption by the audience.

There is a certain expedience to expert knowledge. It is more time efficient to rally people together around discrete topics and relay information in a packaged way. Also, the more technical the knowledge, the less widely it is shared, so a certain amount of block building through didactic approaches to knowledge sharing is essential. But didactic knowledge can also give the illusion of effective, rational uses of time when time might

be used to further participatory knowledge production and to strengthen a democratic process that would reflect environmental justice goals of procedural and participatory justice. Didactic scientific and technical knowledge also often conveys an objectivity and facticity that belie the way that knowledge actually operates in a sphere of social constructions. It embeds a discursive formation and ontological underpinning that valorizes scientific and technical approaches as a logical way forward to change without considering the way that matters of fact are imbued with matters of concern (Latour 2012); or the way that knowledge is always socially and politically constructed (Foucault 1972; 2010). One question is: what good will discrete packages of expert knowledge do "if [knowledge] can't be made compatible with a political project" of social change in the face of unprecedented global changes that affect all populations (Thayer 2014).

People did struggle to engage this question of how to make knowledge compatible with political goals. Question and answer sessions often reflected this engagement, as we will see in the *Green Net* and Climate Teach-In examples in this chapter. Organizers, however, were not always clear (with themselves and with one another) about the kinds of knowledge practices that were being engaged simultaneously. At *High Road* one day, for example, board members were considering whether to invite someone to talk about fracking at a future roundtable event. When one board member showed some reluctance and expressed "it's a controversy," Jack (one of the original founders of *High Road*) replied: "yeah, I know. The question is – do we want to engage the controversy? . . . If *High Road* got involved we could do education. We could educate ourselves." (Field Notes, October 3, 2013). Jack wants to learn about fracking in order to move public dialogue forward; and in order to establish a foundation of discrete knowledge that can be

used to take a stand the controversy. However, other board members are not sure that this is the use towards which they agree knowledge should be put.

## Knowledge Production and Professionalism

The field of activity also revealed a desire by some members to remain politically neutral despite the political implications of a just and sustainable discourse. As I discussed in Chapter 4,  professionalism affected local activity deeply. The professional role of many of the participants at these community events served to limit the kind of knowledge production people were willing to engage in, even at very basic levels. Like the workforce development officer who emphasized that he could not participate in *High Road* if it were to take on a strictly advocacy role (see chapter 4), many people who attended roundtables or panels in their capacity as professional representatives did not want to take a political position. Doing so would run counter to the rules of participation in their organization, even where an organization's substantive goals aligned with substantive information being presented by experts in the field.

For example, the intern at *High Road*, Jay, a white male college student studying sustainability and business, who later took a job as an outreach organizer at *Democratic Energy*, described how difficult it was for him to implement a new board strategy to encourage organizations to commit to sending two or three members of their staff to *High Road*'s roundtables. Jay conveyed a story in which an administrator from a local food policy and agricultural organization did not want to commit to sending members to a *High Road* roundtable on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) because he did not want the organization to be seen as taking a position on GMOs.  When Jay assured this

leader that the GMO roundtable was just about creating a conversation, not taking a position on anything — that even *High Road* itself hadn't taken a position on GMO — the professional agreed to help advertise the roundtable, but stood by his resistance to making a commitment to send any members of their organization. Jay, who was responsible for inviting potential speakers and participants to roundtables during the course of a year, said he came across this kind of resistance to participation numerous times.

This political reality raises serious questions about the limits of collective co-production of knowledge in the face of climate change. If local organizations whose work includes engaging in climate issues related to food, energy, and jobs are reluctant to further their own staff participation in knowledge building because the topics are too sensitive or the politics too controversial, community knowledge production is at risk of stopping in its tracks before it has even begun. When "knowers" in the field are reluctant to participate in conversations about topics they haven't yet taken a position on, or can not take a position on because of work policies, a collective process of developing new ontologies is undermined and constrained by the politics of professionalism and the fear of controversy.

### Knowledge Production: Scientific, Technical and Didactic Approaches

In the following section, I will show how roundtables and teach-ins, conferences and panels often disseminated expert knowledge without clearly addressing the assumptions underlying this knowledge, and the uses to which this knowledge might be put. In addition, scientific and technical knowledge were often held out as the most legitimate

form of public information, while dialogue about the differential meanings and situated knowledges of participants tended to be underutilized.

First, however, it is useful to give a brief overview of the substantive topics that panelists and experts addressed. Teach-ins, roundtables, and conferences covered the following categories: ***Science and Technology*** (Including climate change science, geothermal science, solar panel technology, wind turbine technology, water turbine technology, and biodiesel science); ***Products and services*** (including solar panels, solar hot water, insulation, weatherization, oil buying groups, solar panel installation, and biodiesel); ***Municipal state and utility grant programs/Funding opportunities*** (including Mass Save, Green Jobs Trainings, weatherization programs, community solar programs, SRECs (Solar Renewable Energy Credits for generating solar power), rebate programs, cooperative bank loans, and clean energy insurance); ***Alternative economic structures*** (including worker owned cooperatives, solidarity economies, and community ownership); ***Political protest campaigns*** (including divestment, shutting down big coal (Mount Tom and Brayton Point), shutting down the Keystone Pipeline, and anti-fracking initiatives); ***Food politics*** (including food scarcity, community supported agriculture (CSA), food pantries, food deserts, food production, permaculture, biochar, grass-fed livestock, chicken coops, organic farming, and food distribution); and ***Transportation*** (including bicycle lanes, bicycle know-how, fossil fuel statistics, bicycle commuting, high-speed trains, transit equity, increased bus lines, light rail, Smart growth, and the politics of air travel).

Climate change science is often used as a starting point for conversations about the need for systemic change. It operated as a kind of knowledge fulcrum for community engagement around the green economy, clean energy, alternative economic structures, and climate change, because it was understood and presented as the indisputable reason why communities should come together to think seriously about changes that should be made in the face of an increasingly insecure global future marked by extreme weather patterns, food insecurity, economic and environmental distress. As I discussed in earlier chapters, responding to the realities of climate change ran the political gamut from a politics of supposed neutrality that stressed adaptation and mitigation as a municipal planning matter, to a radical anti-capitalist politics that stressed global systemic transformation.

Many of the presentations I attended included climate science facts to provide a basis for reflecting on what communities can, should, or need to do in the face of these facts. Often, local scientists who were experts in geology, meteorology, physics, and agriculture were invited as presenters and panelists to emphasize the grim realities of climate change to the audience. While climate science represents a central reality that is worth educating community members about, people tend to assume that because the science speaks so clearly, and because people are genuinely concerned, that solutions such as energy efficiency campaigns, clean energy infrastructure, and new consumption practices will logically follow, and are even economically inevitable. Yet, as several theorists and researchers have shown, socially just and sustainable solutions do not arise in a linear way from environmental knowledge (Newton 2002); and understanding the fundamentals of sustainability is not a good predictor of sustainable behavior (Redman

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and Redman 2014).

One illustration of how climate science was incorporated at *Green Net* reveals the tension between declarative, factual knowledge and the potential, yet slighted opportunity for community engagement in imagining a different way of doing things. On November 13, 2013, a white male geologist stood at the front of the regularly white and older crowd that gathers once a month at a local conference center to listen to presentations, and to network over food and drinks. He had been invited by the board members of the newly incorporated non-profit. Many members of the audience are regulars, but the speaker tonight is new to the group. True to his expertise, he presented impressive Powerpoint slides that revealed the impact of greenhouse gases over time, and affirmed the realities of global warming.

Slide after slide of graphs depicted temperature rises, ice volume decline, and carbon levels in the atmosphere. One of the last slides read:

> "Our challenge ~~as scientists and~~ as citizens is to confront our political leaders to demand they address these problems in order to build a more sustainable and equitable global society." (Field Notes November 13, 2013).

The words "as scientists and" were struck through to emphasize the fact that each of us, including scientists, are ultimately citizens, and responsible as such, to act in the face of this planetary challenge. The challenge appealed to public engagement, yet the presentation itself was limited by the nature of its expert presentation. Many regulars were already familiar with this science and they were involved in some kind of daily clean energy work: implementing green jobs training programs, installing solar panels, insulating homes, and writing municipal grants. Therefore, while the question and answer

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session enabled audience participation, the structure of the process made it a classic

preaching to the choir moment. Ultimately, the gathering presented a missed opportunity

for what could be done in this room, in this moment — as in so many of these

presentations that I witnessed at *High Road* and at *Green Net.*

A member of the audience asked what messaging to use that would be effective given the

irony that the message of money from the fossil fuel companies has so far won over the

unequivocal message from climate scientists. The professor responded that instead of

talking about climate change, President Obama talks about green jobs and the green

economy – that this is one way to gain political traction[1] within the context of powerful

monied interests.

He also pointed to the example of Germany, as a country that is leading the way in

showing that good investments pay – that investing in clean energy creates jobs, it

doesn't deplete them. He said: "that's where we have to go with the conversation. If we

talk about the year 2050, it means nothing. If you say 'it will get warmer by 1 degree and

it's 5 degrees out, people will say 'that's great.'" The professor ended by urging people to

"look at the impacts – to try to get that across to people," contradicting in part, his

assessment that the science itself was not going to do much to inspire change.

At this point in the question and answer session, the facilitator said "this is a good place

to end up on – a message we can carry forth and try to reach people where they are." It

was unclear, however, what the message was exactly. No consensus or outline of

messaging had been reached except that climate science was a startling reality we all

wanted to take on. The difference between the inspiration of the gathering, and its trite, abrupt, and unsatisfying conclusion had the effect of a stultifying thud. It was a feeling that repeated itself often in different contexts and that was often voiced by others, as in the example I mention in Chapter 4 when Kathy from *High Road* had said, "I get so frustrated at the end of these meetings because I just want to bring it to the next level.  I want to find some things that we can *do* with this information – like action steps" (Field Notes, January 23, 2013).

A lesson in science gets a public on board with the reality of global warming; or with the technologies of solar, geothermal, or wind power — and this is motivated by different kinds of political and economic discursive projects: capitalism, alternative economics, technological prowess etc. This kind of knowledge production is essential to exploring just sustainability. However, this approach seems to suffer from a lack of strategizing about what kinds of knowledge would be useful for which ends; and what kinds of knowledge production would be useful at which moments. It seems that it is not just a scientific crisis or an economic crisis that communities are facing; it is a crisis of knowledge — of knowing what kind of know-how is called for in the face of the facts; and how to engage or practice knowledge building with the public. Knowledge production seems to be a few steps behind emerging discursive formations of sustainability and justice. In part, this is where a lack of clarity about the relationship between sustainability and justice discussed in chapters 3 and 4 bumps up against processes of knowledge production. That is, without being as devastatingly clear about the way that justice is integrally bound up with fossil fuel use, as climate science is about the devastating consequences of climate change for people and the planet, this

devastating knowledge sits there motoring in the driveway.  It is difficult for emerging publics — especially those characterized by lives of significant privilege garnered from fossil fuel use — to step on the proverbial gas and drive movements for sustainability that are fueled by a commitment to social justice.

The assumption that there is a unified message that must be or can easily be shared with others comes up quite a bit, and it suffers from an over-reliance on climate change science without being clear about what kind of underlying political commitments are being brought to bear. At the first Clean Energy Conference organized by the University of Massachusetts in November 2008, for example, Bracken Hendricks,[2] gave a rousing speech about the necessity of clean energy and the promise of green jobs. One of his key points was to inspire people to be messengers in their communities:  "we need messengers." What the message was supposed to be exactly was assumed to be shared. The way in which processes of communication and interaction in these settings leave the content of "the message" largely unexamined and under-debated, makes for a flattening of the knowledge production, limiting the possibilities for creative and democratic participation that inheres in the coming together of diverse community members.

At another climate change teach-in sponsored by a local chapter of Bill McKibben's international advocacy organization, 350.org[3], the presentation of scientific facts also took precedence over collective engagement with the facts, as evidenced by the following story.

The event took place in the basement of a local church. The organizer, a retired white male teacher, had invited four panelists to speak about climate change and its effects,

including a physicist, a geologist, an environmental sociologist, and a political scientist specializing in global energy politics. Each panelist gave a presentation that focused on climate change and its effects whether geological  socio-political, or biological. The audience filled the seats and a number of people stood against the wall. The energy in the room was bubbling with deep concern and interest and it seemed that a number of people know each other from the church at which the event was taking place. The audience was predominantly white, and strikingly old. I had brought my daughter who was eleven years old at the time, and she was one of about five people out of sixty-five people present who did not sport grey or white hair.

After the climate change panelists had finished their presentations (which included a power point about climate science similar to the one described in the *Green Net* story), the audience began a rousing conversation about morality. The first person to speak, an older white woman who looked to be in her 70s or 80s said: "We have to start coloring it in moral issues more and more, because they (oil companies) are criminals – they are evil." Another woman, her friend, added to this comment by asking a rhetorical question about whether the oil companies were at all concerned about their own grandchildren. It seemed that many in this audience were concerned about intergenerational justice and the impossibility of the world their grandchildren were inheriting. This perspective was shared by the facilitator who had opened the evening explaining that his own interest in climate activism was driven by his concern as a grandfather.

The moral intensity of this first audience response was somewhat startling. It was also marked by a genuine passion and desire to do something; to act in the face of the terrible

statistics we had just heard. The presenters at whom this question was directed, fielded

the question well, taking it seriously, while adding context that encouraged collective

responses that could reflect on morality while refraining from scapegoating:

> Presenter 1:  The people at Exxon-Mobil *do* have grandchildren. I disagree with the first speaker – they're not all evil – it's dangerous to look at it that way. Besides money, what is making them tick – they see science, they do have grandchildren. I think we have to address a change in culture.
>
> Presenter 2: I don't think they're evil. They *are* ideologically committed. They've been successful in every way.  Society celebrates success. They resort to the virtues of free-market, belief in the invisible hand. [Referring to the CEO of an energy company who made 24 million dollars last year:] He's gonna take care of his grandchildren just fine.
>
> Presenter 1: We're heading into a Darwinian struggle over energy. Renewables will prevail and they know it. They're determined to stay in power as long as they can.  They're gonna be defeated by their own . . . self-destruction and the rise of their competitors.
>
> Presenter 2: For most folks there's an unwillingness that things could be that troublesome.
>
> Presenter 1: Everybody knows that it's bad but wants to deny it. (Field Notes, May 17, 2012)

While at this point, the crowd and the panelists were very deeply engaged with each other

about climate science, and the complexity of social and economic relations embedded in

the realities of change, the facilitator for the evening's program impatiently stopped the

process saying: "OK, Let's move on --- that one definitely touched a nerve."

The facilitator proceeded to direct the audience to pay attention to James Hansen's[4] op-ed

of May 9, 2012 regarding the fact that going forward with the Tar Sands project would be

"game-over for climate change." Moving forward with more factual knowledge at this

moment in the evening's program did not allow for organic responses to take root as

ways of knowing that might lead us all to a different place. The potential productivity of "hitting a nerve" was forgone for attachment to a process that focused on the transference of information. There was a tension here between knowledge that the audience could consume and take home in a package, and knowledge practices that engaged a collective process through which people could come to "know" through dialogue and debate.

One of the broad brush assumptions and also, effects of climate change science is that this knowledge (and discourse) promotes energy efficiency and renewable energy development and consumption. The themes of clean energy and energy efficiency generated a lot of local knowledge seeking and knowledge disseminating activity in these areas, whether it was through the implementation of state conservation grants for municipalities; the implementation of state energy audits at *Democratic Energy*; roundtables on the logistical, financial and political feasibility of community solar and big wind at *High Road*; or the promotion of deep energy retrofits at *Green Net*. Here too, it became clear that science and technology superseded community exploration about how people experienced energy efficiency or renewable energy, and what that might add to community knowledge production.

For example, *Green Net* heavily promoted a notion that deep energy retrofits were the best kind of energy efficiency one could have in one's home, while asking far fewer questions about affordability, feasibility, and on-the ground experience that might help the community reformulate its goals and perspectives. At one monthly gathering, a local woman named Joan presented pictures of the retrofitting process in her modest middle-class home. Joan started her talk saying that she first came to *Green Net* because she felt

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powerless about the issue of climate change, and "I wanted to see what I could do." She was inspired by Scott's emphasis on retrofitting homes. And when she and her husband heard about a pilot program through which a local electric company was offering five $40,000 grants to finance deep energy retrofits in local homes, they jumped at the opportunity. In the end, their retrofit cost a total of $110,000, a price which was touted as one of the lowest totals for a deep energy retrofit in the local area. A representative from the electrical company said that Joan's retrofit was the cheapest, and that totals for deep energy retrofits financed by the electric company's pilot program ran bills up to $300,000. During her talk, Joan identified air quality and comfort as the biggest "wows" of the retrofit changes, in addition to significant energy savings and the feel good fact of a significantly smaller carbon foot print, although she emphasized that electricity savings are not so much a result of retrofits as they are of unplugging and using energy efficient appliances.

While this presentation was an opportunity to explore the knowledge gained by having done a retrofit, it was treated more as an exposé of the technological features that went into the retrofit. It seemed that Joan wanted to relay what the retrofit was like for her, while contractors in the room wanted to know the specifics of the insulation processes. Joan was interrupted numerous times by construction experts in the room who corrected what they felt were technical inaccuracies. They asked questions and made statements such as: "isn't that supposed to be covered with sheetrock because of the fire code?" and: "that's a great moisture barrier but it's on the wrong side." At one point, a contractor in the audience wanted to know whether the windows had been taken out to ensure proper retrofits around the window sills and frames. Joan replied that the windows had not been

taken out. The electrical company representative contradicted her, telling the audience, in place of Joan, that all the windows *had* been taken out: "it was done properly. They took out all the old windows, put sealing in, and then put them back in until they could afford new windows." While the topic of this presentation was the very essence of *Green Net*'s vision and goals — to share information about energy efficiency process in order to create expand the market and green the local economy, the evening felt very limited in terms of the level of the conversation, and the places this conversation could go.

After the presentation, I spoke with one of the board members, Tom. He told me that when he had embarked on the project of retrofitting his home (which he is doing in phases because of the cost and complexity of the task), he initially thought this might be a great way to generate new jobs, and for low-income people to fix old homes. But he revealed that the experience of retrofitting his home made him think differently: "I've come to the conclusion that it's really not an efficient way to do sustainability by doing retrofits because it's a lot of time and a lot of money. It's actually cheaper to build your own home." Tom asserted that on the other hand, building new homes uses up farmland and threatens to cause the overdevelopment of available land, emphasizing that "there is this back and forth between efficiency and inefficiency." In addition, the price tag of todays's showcase retrofit, a whopping $110,000 dollars, was as low as it gets, underscoring that affordability is a serious issue for energy efficiency (Field Notes May 8, 2013).

It struck me that Tom's experience with retrofitting his own home had generated valuable questions worth exploring about the interplay between efficiency and inefficiency, and

the intersection of affordability and accessibility of this work to the average homeowner or resident. This kind of exploration was noticeably absent from the public discussion itself. It seems that the technical knowledge is overvalued at the expense of knowledge that engages questions of efficiency writ large, as well as questions of accessibility, housing inequity, costs, benefits, and relative effectiveness.

While factual knowledge is essential as a fulcrum for motivating social change, multiple ways of knowing are often suppressed in favor of more didactic knowledge. Experts produce knowledge and then they demonstrate it; while the knowledge that is produced through interaction is under-acknowledged as an important knowledge practice in and of itself. The "conversation" keeps getting cut short. "The message" is too broad: "we are in trouble" or: "this is the science." The participatory knowledge that is produced in and through these events is under-acknowledged and undertapped.


**The Search for Know-How: Leveraging Community Resources and Expertise**

The field is not all didactic, and not all group interactions are marked by sidelining dialogue and collective meaning-making. One professor who presented at *High Road* for example, discussed his approach with his students at a local university. He talked about helping his privileged students find ways to think about food security as a key way to think about dealing with impacts of climate change, explaining that his students work to gain experience growing food in pots, on roofs and in their own backyards, taking seriously Richard Heinberg's[5] claim that we will need 50 million farmers in America to survive climate change. He also underscored that this kind of know-how is not enough. Adapting to and mitigating climate change will also take new policy.  To engage this

imperative, he has students working on policy visions that include tax incentives, low interest loans, chicken laws, and public farms. "I try to herd these 60 students because they're gonna change the world. We need to direct that energy and get them some experience" (Field Notes, June 27, 2012).

*Democratic Energy* also brings people together to brainstorm, emphasizing participatory knowledge production. As an organization, they practice different ways of bringing people together to facilitate change, not just to educate them didactically about climate science, or to introduce them to new available products and services. Their leadership development trainings and local organizing councils are an example of implementing knowledge practices that go beyond the didactic. Not only do the exercises at leadership development trainings focus more on reflection and sharing knowledge, than transferring ready-made knowledge, participants themselves use the leadership development trainings as a place to process goals and strategies for the organization and for larger visions of a just and sustainable society. In particular, the leadership development trainings are intended to help *Democratic Energy* leaders, whether they be staff or community members, run their local organizing councils more effectively. *Democratic Energy* gives space for interested members to offer their skills to the organization, not merely to fulfill the goals as they have already been set, but also to move those goals forward or to shape them in different ways.

For example, after the first leadership training that I attended in February of 2011, a white man named Mark suggested that what was missing from that weekend's session on envisioning action steps for *Democratic Energy*'s local organizing councils, was a

concentration on strategy. Mark had attended this training as a community member interested in joining others to create community owned sustainable energy projects. He was very interested in *Democratic Energy*'s work, yet frustrated by what he, and as this research shows, many others saw as a gap between vision and application. After some conversations at a local organizing council and with the director of *Democratic Energy*, Mark offered to become the trainer for the next leadership development training scheduled for November 2012. This was one of many times that I witnessed *Democratic Energy* practice a dialogical openness to participants' suggestions and critiques.

Mark led the weekend with the question: "why are our progressive social change organizations not doing as well as they could?" He talked about how energy efficiency and technology that is available now is basically sitting on the shelves. He asked the rhetorical question: "what is missing from these organizations?" His answer: "I believe it is strategy." The goal for the weekend he said, was "not to create a long term goal or strategic plan. The main goal was to learn techniques that will allow us to develop strategies over time" (Field Notes November 10, 2012). Mark told the group to think about moving from a vision to actionable goals, which he explained are specific targets to meet in order to reach the mission. For example, in the case of global warming, Mark said, "We need to be specific about how to reduce it. Scientists say we need to reduce emissions 90% by 2050 – we can take that as an actionable goal."

While Mark was invited to be a weekend facilitator as part of a dialogic process in which *Democratic Energy* welcomed new community feedback and leadership, his facilitation ironically served to stifle the leadership training more than open it up. In the process of

facilitating a more systematic way for the organization to look at the whole picture, Mark's framework became an imposition when the group did not resonate with his ideas that much; and when Mark's tight allegiance to his weekend plan did not allow for a process of dialogue about different kinds of organizing approaches. In the end, this weekend training was flawed for the way in which Mark's thinking took too much precedence over everyone else's.

The interesting thing about knowledge production at *Democratic Energy* is that the organization is remarkably open and engages a fluid process of integrating ongoing feedback in real time. While Mark tried to get the group to map the specific actionable goals, necessary research, and strategies that could be implemented for each long-term vision in a linear way, the people in the room brought the process back to a state of making the road by walking it; and the leaders maintained an openness about where the process might need to go next. One participant, Santiago, a young Latino man who was a new member of *Democratic Energy* at that time, was frustrated by the way that the weekend workshop was leading people to think about new goals and strategies when there were already projects on the table that needed discussion and development. In one breakout session he said:

> "It comes down to the local organizing council (LOC). Who do you have on the LOC? That can dictate what is feasible and what is not. If you have relationships in place you can do a lot. This is an opportunity to talk about actual projects and working out these problems. With the biodiesel plant, we are taking on a lot of responsibility. When will we take the time to work out that responsibility? I'm having a hard time with this. We are talking theoretically. Instead of having theoretical conversations, let's actually have the conversation. This biodiesel plant is huge. We are marketing a product. Are we prepared to take on this responsibility? Is it an LOC responsibility? If not, then whose responsibility is it? Leadership retreats are the place to engage in understanding our structure and

practicing how we talk about *Democratic Energy* to recruit new members"
(Fieldnotes, November 11, 2012).

Many people in the room resonated with what Santiago had to say, and subsequently, his

approach was collectively integrated to the next steps for the organization's leadership

development. Santiago's approach was not entirely different from Mark's — he too

wanted to talk about strategy and action steps, but he wanted the conversation to focus

more on the work that *Democratic Energy* was already doing. This now newly modified

approach was incorporated into the next leadership training in February 2013, at which

the sessions focused on what kind of leaders people in the room think they are, and what

kinds of leadership skills could be developed further in order to improve the effectiveness

of the local organizing councils.

Feedback from several leadership development participants was also incorporated into

the next training. A few participants (a position I also took in my anonymous evaluation

form for the weekend) asserted that the structure of having one expert facilitator lead the

training took away from the enormous potential of leadership among the participants in

the room and at *Democratic Energy*. People thought it might be a better use of time to

have *Democratic Energy* leaders co-facilitate the next training. This new feedback was

incorporated in the subsequent training where facilitation was shared between several

*Democratic Energy* leaders who were local organizing council facilitators, education and

outreach staff, and board members, including Santiago. Integrating participants' feedback

into the training approaches in such a systemic way demonstrated a commitment to

participatory knowledge practices. In the subsequent leadership training, facilitation by a

group of *Democratic Energy* leaders rather than by one expert facilitator put the focus of

knowledge production more squarely on the engaged community of participants, and allowed me to see the contrast between knowledge practices that focused on expert presentations and those that built from participants' collective and cross-pollinating knowledge. The following ethnographic story shows the process of knowledge production that occurred in that setting.

**Engaging Leadership Strengths and Leadership Imperatives**

A group of 21 people has gathered for the weekend at a retreat center on the South Shore of Boston in a small, well-to-do coastal town. Most of those attending have worked at *Democratic Energy* for two or more years, some as board members, some as paid education and outreach workers, and some as active local organizing council volunteers. Most have spent time with one another at previous retreats and at board meetings and local organizing council meetings. The atmosphere is calm, though a little stiff, and people are seated in folding chairs as well as bench couches lined against a room with windows on three sides. The chairs are arranged in a semi-circle facing three facilitators who are also members and organizers at *Democratic Energy*. From a visual count and from what I know of the individuals present, there are 3 women of color, 3 men of color, 5 white women, and 10 white men.

At one point, the facilitators ask people to convene in small groups based on their local organizing council.  The councils represented are from Boston, Worcester, Hampshire County, Hamden County and Franklin County. Each council is asked to do a go-round in which each member identifies what kind of leader they think they are based on Eric Mann's outline of 12 types of leaders, including evangelists, foot soldiers, strategists, and

fundraisers. The idea is to reflect on the leadership strengths of each local organizing council, and to discuss what kinds of leadership each LOC still needs.

When everyone is asked to reconvene, the group from Worcester writes down the leadership qualities they think are important on a flip chart for everyone to see. The Worcester group has not followed Mann's outline closely, preferring to use their own guideposts. This is something that happens quite often at *Democratic Energy* — the transformation of tools and the re-articulation of frameworks.

The group's outline highlights issues like "Distributing expertise and responsibilities;" "Holding people who have expertise accountable so they're not dominating the turf;" and "designing your group so everyone has a role, so no one's carrying more than anyone else and making sure no one's bucket is too full." They have also listed the cooperative economic concept of "autogestion,"[6] or "self-management," explaining that everyone is capable of self-managing and engaging in tasks that they may not like as much or feel as talented in.

One person in the large group responds with the reflection: "what I see missing is: where's the trainer? A good trainer will say – this is what works best so you don't waste time doing something that doesn't work." One of the members of the small group, a woman who is originally from Guatemala, responds by critiquing the knowledge production assumed in the exercise which reflects dominant conceptions of leadership, while offering a new way to think about leadership and the knowledge production that inheres in leadership processes. She says:

"Part of autogestion is you don't need to be trained – *you* have the power.  I came from a background where education isn't about telling me what to do. I haven't lived where you live. I didn't learn what you learned. To self-define what works for you; coming from a culture where you're spoon fed – if you have to rely on someone who is teaching you — it's on the person. Part of being in a coop is collaborating. I have a leg and you have an arm, -- I'll be your leg and you'll be my arm instead of "we're all legs."  What we were trying to say is – if you're a foot soldier all the time, you're gonna get burned out." (Field Notes, February 16, 2013).

This was one of the few reflections I witnessed that expressed a critical analysis of the knowledge practices embedded in activism. The idea here is that if clean energy is going to be just, knowledge practices have to include dialogical, relational, and integrative practices. The pitfall here however, is exactly how the above respondent described it — often, people are seeking quick facts to plug into their individual consumption possibilities. Many people are looking for clean energy products and services without wanting to be part of a movement, or without wanting to change ontologies in the face of a crisis of old systems of fossil fuel production, distribution and consumption.

One staff member, who is responsible for fielding phone calls at *Democratic Energy*'s main office reveals this in clear terms when she says:

"If you do the Neighbor to Neighbor [solar installation] program, the $975 membership is awash. People who have gotten Neighbor to Neighbor are not interested in membership.  I talk to people who are very practical people – they're not thinking about changing the world. I'm talking to them in concrete ways like scheduling an energy audit."

She appeals to the leadership development group to help her manage the discrepancy between knowledge practices that seek to engage the transformative potential that *Democratic Energy* is committed to in its mission, and the practical and technical knowledge that is sought by the public when they call the main office for products and

services: "I hit all these things – help me have a conversation." She also shows that that despite the limitations of consumer-oriented knowledge practices, she integrates a democratic ontology in her approach to customers who call *Democratic Energy* for their products and services: "We want to give people a five year plan. I think of myself as an expert of experts. The idea is – where do you want to be – let's help you get there rather than saying, "this is where you need to be" (Field Notes, February 16, 2013).

As an organization, *Democratic Energy* articulated a clear commitment to collective processes of knowledge production, especially in its frequent expression that democratic practice was central to the organization's goals. Homsy and Warner define the co-production of knowledge as an approach that "does not give primacy to either the knowledge of science or the knowledge of society but recognizes the importance of both (Homsy & Warner 2013: 294). This co-production approach was most evident in the local organizing council activity and in the leadership development trainings attended by core organizers, staff and volunteers. At the same time however, *Democratic Energy* often found itself face to face with a public and a membership that was more interested in finding out about and purchasing available products and services than in participating in local organizing council meetings and leadership development trainings that sought to draw from an integrated approach to knowledge sharing and knowledge building. This ended up creating a dynamic in which the organization was pulled into developing goods and services, and not to collective knowledge building per se.

At the same time however, clean energy products and services embedded a message of social change. The project of "changing thinking," and not just offering clean energy

goods, was evident in the organization's commitment to local ownership. As Jim put it: "Alice's [the director] passion is "we change the game through local ownership. Our enterprise is responsive to our local needs" (Field Notes, February 16, 2013). While the central office fielded phone calls from busy New Englanders looking to install solar hot water heaters or sign onto an oil buying group; or tabled the local food cooperatives to promote weatherization through the Mass Save program; the organization participated in business planning meetings, owned shares in the local Biodiesel Plant, and invited locals to come up with their own clean energy projects through the local organizing council structure. This two-pronged approach — being a business as well as a *movement* — necessitated very different approaches to knowledge dissemination and knowledge production that played out in very different spaces.

The tension between knowledge practices that favored expert presentations and those that favored dialogical, participatory co-creation was under-acknowledged. Participatory knowledge practices were most useful for people to put heads together and imagine new ways of doing things — for pushing the agenda of social transformation forward. Didactic knowledge practices were most useful for disseminating basic or foundational information to a group, and for explaining an array of clean energy products and services to consumers who were not necessarily interested in pooling their knowledge with the community to affect change. What was missing from these processes was a clear examination of knowledge practices as important dynamics to consider in strategizing for change.

**Conclusions**

In the landscape of local justice and sustainability efforts in the face of climate change, there is a process of knowledge seeking that everyone is engaged in. This is true for organizers, business, owners, municipal workers, grandparents, retirees, students, and the unemployed. Many people are looking for more information — about climate science, about specific technologies, about ways to fund large scale, community, or individual clean energy and energy efficiency initiatives. While this knowledge seeking process is exciting in that it facilitates diverse networks of citizens, processes of knowledge seeking and knowledge dissemination are under-acknowledged as resources and strategies that can serve different kinds of productive functions for this movement of change.

Although discussions that took place at climate change teach-ins, *Democratic Energy*'s leadership trainings, and *High Road* roundtables involved participatory knowledge-making, knowledge was largely imparted in didactic factual ways. More value was placed on "declarative" (factual) and "procedural" (how-to) knowledge than on ways of knowing that emphasized experience, social relations, collaboration, integration or problem solving (Redman and Redman 2014). Some of this had to do with expediency. It is easier to organize a presentation by an expert than to engage in a community process of collective envisioning. Some of this has to do with what kinds of knowledge the public itself is asking for and expecting. Building new knowledge that has to do with new ways of relating and being is harder to bring to bear. It is more circular and involves democratic practices of engagement that can be unwieldy and time-consuming, with no guaranteed outcomes.

One of the dilemmas is the uncertainty that climate change presents. In the face of this uncertainty, how will we know? How will we build knowledge? What an emerging green public could be more aware of is the productive potential of this kind of democratic, participatory knowledge seeking. Allowing more room for climate mitigation and adaptation efforts to draw from multiple ways of knowing about an issue may allow for knowledge to be more productive, more collective, and more democratic.

As organizations dedicated to impacting the course of the green economy to ensure a high road economy and a multi-race, multi-class vision of community ownership, *High Road* and *Democratic Energy* were engaged in knowledge practices that sought to produce new ways of knowing that countered "business as usual" and enacted an intention for transformative economic and political change.  This process, is of course, a political one. As Casas-Cortes, Isabel, Osterwiel and Powell eloquently write:

> "Whether through direct and explicit contestation of "expert" discourses, or through proliferating a variety of alternative ways of knowing and being, including alternative economic, social and cultural models, the production of knowledges by movements intervenes in important operations of power. As such, practices such as fighting for an alternative concept and practice of development, engaging in a distinct notion and enactment of democracy, and articulating different questions and analyses of political contexts, should not only all be understood as knowledge-practices but the knowledge thus produced must be understood as intervening in a complex, contentious, political field" (Casas-Cortés, Isabel, Osterweil and Powell 2008:46).

Jamison writes: "much will depend on how successful 'movement intellectuals' in an emergent movement of climate justice will be in developing public spaces where scientists, engineers, and citizens can come together to learn from each other and bring their different kinds of knowledge into fruitful combinations" (Jamison 2010: 820). This chapter has shown that while fruitful combinations are budding in these local movements

for justice and sustainability, knowledge practices rely heavily on expertise and an

attachment to scientific knowledge without fully considering the range of knowledge

practices that might be employed to different short and long term ends. Moreover, with

both approaches to knowledge production, participants are still dealing with the problem

of finding adequate footholds for action, even as different knowledge approaches are

engaged.

The quality of participation is also worth looking at. In the next chapter, I will consider

the nature of the public that is being created in the process of this knowledge seeking and

knowledge production activity.

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[1] As discussed in Chapter Two, national advocacy for green jobs was at its height in 2008, however, it had lost much of its traction by 2013, especially at the federal level.

[2] Hendricks is a high profile policy advocate of clean energy who served as an advisor in the Clinton and Obama administrations and was a founding director, in 2003, of the *Apollo Alliance,* a coalition of labor, business, environmental, and community leaders promoting clean energy infrastructure and investment in clean energy, energy efficiency, "high quality" green jobs, and mass transit. In 2011, the Apollo Alliance merged with the BlueGreen Alliance Foundation to become the Apollo Alliance Project, which still promotes investments in clean energy.

[3] 350.org is an international grassroots climate movement organization that was started in 2008 by author, Bill McKibben, a climate activist from Vermont, and several university friends. On its website, the organizers state: "we believe that a global grassroots movement can hold our leaders accountable to the realities of science and the principles of justice." 350.org works on global campaigns that include fighting coal plants in India, protesting the Keystone Xl pipeline in the US, and divesting public institutions from fossil fuels. (see 350.org).

[4] James Hansen is an astro-physicist and climatologist who is famous for his Congressional testimony on global warming in 1988. He was the head of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies for more than 30 years and now directs the Program on Climate Science, Awareness and Solutions at Columbia University's Earth Institute. He is a public climate change activist and has been arrested multiple times at climate change demonstrations.

[5] Richard Heinberg is an author and journalist who is currently a fellow at the Post Carbon Institute, a think tank in California whose research focus includes climate change, energy sources, and social resilience.

[6] Autogestion is a Spanish concept that is linked to cooperative economics and anarchist political thought. Essentially, it means "self-management." The idea is that workers can be self-sufficient and manage their own workplace without corporate models that disempower worker ownership, leadership, and innovation. Mondragon is one famous example. This concept travelled the globe and is also known in Brazil as "autogestao."

# CHAPTER 6
## EMERGING CLIMATE CHANGE PUBLICS: STRUCTURE, PROCESS, AND POTENTIAL

**<u>Introduction</u>**

In chapter 4, I discussed how this emerging public struggles with the tension between the discourses of sustainability and justice, and has a hard time finding ways to secure effective change. In chapter 5, I discussed the tension between didactic and dialogic approaches to knowledge, and showed how both approaches still face the problem of grappling with the gap between an inspired discourse and effective action. In this chapter, I argue that another reason that the gap between vision and footings is persistent is because of tensions in the social construction of this public. The dynamics described in chapter 4 and 5 come together to create a public that is characterized by a lack of inclusiveness, and a commitment to democratic participation that is only partially realized.

On the one hand, it can be argued that an emerging climate change public is taking shape in tandem with national and global discourses of sustainability and justice. On the other hand, the basis of this public is murky. Are local movements made up of a community of experts that merely open up their doors once in a while to public participation? Or are local movements primarily made up of concerned citizens who can tackle the issues in ways that the state and market cannot, since the latter are so deeply structured to support capitalism? Whose interests are centered in these interactions? This chapter reveals that while local organizations and movements *do* orient themselves based on public interests, and express an intention to be driven by public participation; the public dimension of

sustainability and justice work is quickly compromised by two things: limited demographics and an allegiance to professionalism.

Emirbayer and Sheller emphasize that the relationships that constitute publics are patterned across three dimensions: social structure (positions), culture (symbols) and social psychology (collectively experienced and created "psychical currents"). They assert that the study of publics can benefit from an empirical examination of relations across these dimensions (Emirbayer and Sheller 1998, 728). They attempt to foreground empirical applications of this question by distinguishing between specific publics and public interactions in terms of "the power differences among public actors," and the "reach" that a specific public "exercises across time and space," taking a close look at "how and where" public interaction and communication occurs as well as across what kinds of increments of time (Emirbayer and Sheller 1998: 740). One of their driving questions is "how do the social structural, cultural or social psychological dimensions of such networks constrain and enable public actors' relations with one another and their capacity to influence institutional settings?" (Emirbayer and Sheller 1998, 729). Taking Emirbayer and Sheller's perspective into account, this chapter looks at what the structure of this emerging local public means for social justice and democratic participation. In this chapter, I ask: who is this public and why? And how is this public being constituted? What is this public able to do? And what are its challenges? What kind of public is being created?

In the following section, I give a general overview of the structure and process of public formation in the three organizations and in the network at large. Next, I analyze two

ethnographic vignettes in detail to elaborate on the questions of structure and process, and especially, to analyze a tension between an emerging public that is made up of concerned citizens, and a public that is professionally oriented.

## Who is This Public and How is it Created?

### A Public Orientation

Local networks around sustainability and justice sought to build public participation in working towards these ends. Each organization in my ethnography centered a good part of their work around getting people together to consider and to debate the issues. Creating these connections constituted a crucial part of how local organizations and networks engaged in sustainability and justice work. *Democratic Energy* articulated this as building community, and emphasized the feeling of connection as important to building resilient and sustainable communities. As Alice, the CEO and director of *Democratic Energy*, expressed at a leadership development training in 2012: "If we feel connected, we will help each other. The next transformation is to feel connected" (Alice, *Democratic Energy*, Feb 2012).

At *High Road*, building public participation meant creating dialogue among stakeholders – even those who may hold opposing positions. At the very beginning of its inception as a community organization, one of *High Road*'s founders, Juan, announced an upcoming meeting at a sustainability conference put on by *Democratic Energy* in the following terms: "There is a green jobs meeting in Springfield, exploring: how can we begin to weave that — the strengths and contributions of each interconnectivity?" Juan's approach was to encourage people to get to know each other as community and environmental stakeholders in order to activate participatory democracy in the service of social change:

"Sustainability begins with us. It's not something that looks good in a book. We have to complete the participatory process to understand each other's needs, so that were not just looking at it from one prism. We have to test our assumptions – then we can make informed choices" (Juan, Sustainability Summit, *Democratic Energy*, June 2008).

What was the outcome of this participatory philosophy? What kind of community was generated by this appeal to participatory justice and social sustainability?

**Rallying Public Participation: Commitment, Structure, Process and Effectiveness**

*Democratic Energy*, *High Road*, and *Green Net* all expressed a commitment to engaging the public at-large. Each organization regularly appealed to "the community" for input, participation, reflection, as well as expertise. While *High Road* and *Democratic Energy* created many invitations and openings for public participation, they struggled to attract new members. Their circles remained small, though they were welcoming to newcomers, and indeed, depended on them to keep their momentum and work going. As is to be expected, there was a difference between membership based activity and public events such that the latter attracted more people including more newcomers. While much of *Democratic Energy*'s work was member driven, and while it was sometimes difficult to maintain member participation, its annual sustainability summits attracted large numbers of people. Similarly, periodic teach-ins organized by local activists also drew large numbers of people. Many people from the smaller organizations and networks I studied showed up at these larger events.

At a sustainability summit organized by *Democratic Energy* that I attended in the spring of 2013, for example, the link between small group activity and large-group attendance at this annual event was strong. I was volunteering that day, and my job was to go into each

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room in the conference center to hand presenters a stack of evaluation surveys for conference goers to complete. As I walked into each conference room to deliver the surveys, I felt like I was walking through sections of my ethnography. In one room, there were two engineers from *Democratic Energy* I met at a local organizing committee meeting in Franklin County who were about to run a workshop on biodiesel. In another room, the president of the board of *High Road* was waiting for her session to begin. A regular from *Green Net* was speaking about his fledgling non-profit, and in the next room over, I said hello to an organizer where a former *High Road* presenter was there to talk about the Sustainability Corridor. Another session featured a longtime participant at *High Road* speaking on Transition Towns. A retired man from Vermont that I met at a *Democratic Energy* leadership conference was tabling about community solar. In the hallway, I ran into community organizers from Worcester who had attended several *Democratic Energy* trainings. A professor from the area who spoke at a climate change teach-in was in attendance, as were organizers from a new climate action organization that had facilitated two major climate teach-ins in Amherst and Springfield. It seemed that everyone in my field notes was gathered in one place.

*Democratic Energy* relied on existing networks to draw people to its larger, public events, while always extending a welcome to newcomers in all of its work, whether answering phones, tabling, or facilitating a local organizing council meeting. In terms of implementing a systemic approach of outreach however, *Democratic Energy* struck a hard balance between relatively closed regular meetings and informally open invitations to join up whenever and wherever folks could see themselves participating. *Democratic Energy* was a membership-based cooperative dependent upon intensive member

participation; and committed to listening deeply to member concerns, and making decisions democratically. Regular local organizing meetings and quarterly leadership development trainings were publicized within its existing membership base through a list serve and its website. However, attendance at organizing meetings was hard to sustain, as longterm members moved on to new projects, and because new membership was not easily created from the avenues that regularly drew people to interact with *Democratic Energy*. People interested in *Democratic Energy*'s products and services for example (their bread and butter), were not necessarily interested in getting involved at the level of social change and participatory organizing. As mentioned in chapter 5, one staffer, who fielded products and services calls at the main office explained: "People who have gotten *Neighbor to Neighbor*[1] are not interested in membership. I talk to people who are very practical people – they're not thinking about changing the world. I'm talking to them in concrete ways like scheduling an energy audit. Membership is another part of the tree" (Field Notes February 16, 2013). So while *Democratic Energy* was always open to newcomers, it was a challenge to recharge the organization with new people. *Democratic Energy* had a difficult time realizing diverse community representation despite its commitment to democratic practice and social justice.

*High Road* was similarly limited in drawing from a small loop of members that did not spiral out to the larger public as effectively as it might have, despite its need and desire to build its membership base. Though *High Road* advocates for a people-first engagement with the green economy, the invitees and by extension, the folks who come to the events, are largely professional in make-up. That is, not a lot of citizens come as citizens. People come to the table as a function of their work, their profession, and their institutional or

organizational expertise. "The community" is really a community of organizations and professionals who are either working to push the envelope at their jobs, or simply attend as part of their jobs in workforce development, transportation, food policy, governance, research, policy work, or technology. The "public" being developed is largely a public of professionals.

This is supported by other organizational practices. When organizers at *High Road* discussed ways to increase membership and roundtable participation for example, they focused on reaching out to already existing community organization contacts on their list of 189 contacts, of which only a handful paid membership dues. *High Road* organizers would ask specific list serve members to advertise roundtable events to their networks, especially if they were connected by professional affiliation and thematic niche. Without additional advertising, this approach limited the potential draw of a more diverse public to the roundtable events which were philosophically construed as public events for information sharing that always contained the potential for further community networking and organizing. In addition, this networking process was also severely compromised by organizations' reticence to be seen as taking a political stand on controversial issues, as described in chapter 5.

*Green Net*, on the other hand, cast a less circuitous invite to the public-at-large. It advertised its  monthly panel presentations and networking events in the environmental section of the local newspaper, sent out press releases, and kept contact with its existing membership base through list serve emails and Facebook posts. As a result, *Green Net*'s events often drew upwards of 50 people as compared with *High Road*'s roundtable

average of 8 to 10 participants, and *Democratic Energy*'s membership-based local

organizing meetings of 4 or 5. *Green Net*'s success in drawing larger numbers may also

have had something to do with the fact that their events took place in a local brewery, and

in subsequent years at a hotel conference center, making it easy to combine a number of

participant motivations — professional networking, socializing, education, outreach, as

well as dinner. But it was also less explicitly political, seeing itself as primarily a

networking organization, not a social change organization. *Green Net* appealed largely to

contractors looking to market their energy efficiency and renewable energy services;

municipal workers eager to implement energy efficiency and renewable energy projects

and policy; job seekers in the "green economy;" and homeowners exploring ways to

retrofit their homes.

**Who comes and why?**
What drives people to participate in local sustainability and justice organizing? What do

people say is the draw? While people come to meetings for material and instrumental

reasons — because they are looking for a job, or looking to market their energy

efficiency business or their biodiesel delivery system —  many people speak to deep

meaning systems as the main draw. They express their commitment to social and

environmental change; to new paradigms; to the survival of the planet; and to

philosophies of living that envision justice and sustainability in the practice of everything

from energy extraction to consumption, to the process of decision-making itself.

At *Democratic Energy* especially, the link between an interest in renewable energy and

social change is a strong draw for many participants. At one annual meeting, an organizer

facilitated a working group to consider what it is that makes them passionate about the work that *Democratic Energy* is doing. He began with his own perspective by reading a quote from Van Jones: "our challenge is to begin real change from the bottom up," emphasizing to the group: "that's what gets me passionate" (Field Notes Sept. 15, 2012). Another *Democratic Energy* participant, who joined the energy commission of her small town in order to influence energy decisions in her community spoke to the core philosophy of people power to describe why she became involved in *Democratic Energy*: "Renewable energy, community empowerment, cooperative community problem solving — it helps get power back that I've given away or has been taken from me" (Field Notes, Sept 15, 2012). Applying ideas about a green local economy was another main draw: "When I saw and started reading about the local economy I thought, 'this is how we should live – if we did this, the world would run better'" (Field Notes, February 16, 2013). And pooling resources among members to develop concrete projects was another. Said one *Democratic Energy* organizer, "If it were not for the local organizing councils, it would be difficult for me to commit myself to *Democratic Energy* – it's too abstract for me. But the possibility that the resources of *Democratic Energy* could be deployed at the local level is exciting and motivating" (Field Notes, February 16, 2013).

**Hybrid Collectivities**

The activity I observed on the ground drew from a wide range of people, especially in terms of professional background. The diverse range of participants' roles and professions made for interesting "new associations" (Latour 2010b) and hybrid collectivities and forums (Callon et al 2009). A lot of the activity I witnessed held democratic promise as public spaces of participatory discourse. Events and meetings

brought together realtors and activists, community-based organizers and entrepreneurs, labor representatives and university researchers, retirees and farmers. At the same time as it drew from a wide range of participants, this emerging public suffered from uneven practices. There was a disconnect between the public these organizers were hoping to create and the one they were actually creating. On the one hand, some of the interactions, especially at *Democratic Energy* and *High Road*, reflected the application of democratic principles through for example, their open invitation to the public to join their efforts, not just through attendance, but through active participation in the organizations' goal setting, planning, and implementation. On the other hand, the spaces felt tenaciously white, middle class, male, and dominated by those who represented the professions which drove local, on-the-ground organizing: labor unions in the case of *High Road*; and energy efficiency and renewable energy engineers, contractors, and entrepreneurs, in the case of *Democratic Energy* and *Green Net*.

Although these groups prioritized democratic participation and procedural justice in their community building approach, the nature of this participation reproduced many inequalities. By and large, the people making decisions about green jobs organizing; about which grants to apply for; about policy advocacy; and business development -- are people who are doing so in their role as workforce development managers, union leaders, business owners, and municipal leaders. Communities are either absent from this process or are subsumed in what is really a professional class of laborers trying to think through a new green economy in their positions – not merely as citizens, but as energy auditors, municipal employees, green construction workers, community college leaders, and energy company contractors.

While the gatherings I attended drew from hybrid collectives — this hybridity did not always seem to gel. Sometimes, it seemed to compartmentalize back into its components with no clear connection to larger sustainability and justice goals. There also seemed to be an ambiguity about just how community-oriented this emerging public was going to be in any given interaction, and which mini-publics were being attended to at any given point in the local organizing. At times, it seemed that the public could be anyone interested in social justice or things green. At other times, the public seemed to be the entire globe. At turns, the public became middle class homeowners who could take advantage of Mass Save energy efficiency subsidies; contractors looking for more work; or labor organizers advocating for local contracts in solar or wind turbine installations.

**Social Justice, Race and Privilege in Public Formation**

While people power and participation is a draw, and there is a stated commitment to social justice — race and class equity represents a challenge at the level of demographics, organizational practice, and interactions shaped by the intense segregation effects and underlying racism of the culture and the region. Espousing social justice is one thing — making it work is another — both at the level of relationships, as well as at the level of distributing and accessing resources. In the public that is being created, social justice gets short shrift, and a predictable divide plays out along lines of race. Race, class, and gender dynamics are driven both by historical segregation in these fields (organized labor, builders, contractors, and engineers), as well as by the structural features of regional segregation in the Pioneer Valley. The area is one of the most racially segregated in the nation, and that represents a major weakness in the formation of a climate change public

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there. Much of the "green" activity was represented by members of the "upper" Valley in contrast with the more densely populated and more racially diverse "lower" valley, separated by what some referred to jokingly as the "tofu curtain." Not surprisingly, energy efficiency, clean energy, and a critique of current energy systems grounded participation in tangible ways, while the central framework of social justice — that was much touted in the rhetoric, was relegated to an invisible space, especially when conversations were facilitated by middle class, male, and/or white participants. Questions about who is at the table, who is making decisions, and who is formulating positions and frameworks were largely ignored, despite the fact that the discourse about goals and frameworks for sustainability embedded notions of social equity, inclusion, and access.

*Democratic Energy* was the most verbal about race and class equity and inclusion, but as was to be expected, its members differed about how important race and class was to its mission or whether its mission actually reflected its reality. At one annual meeting for example, the membership was asked to reflect on the written mission statement, which read: "*Democratic Energy* is a multi-racial, multi-class movement for a just and sustainable society." Alice, the director, explained to the group that *Democratic Energy*'s direction needed to be honed because "its goals right now are so wide." The white male contractors in the room expressed partiality to the energy work that climate change impels communities to engage in. One white contractor lamented that the mission statement emphasized the social meaning of the work more than the energy work. Another asked the following question in a leading way, making it clear that he was more interested in energy than race and class justice: "are we talking about a framework of power and people, or is it about energy?" A couple of white men in my small working

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group expressed that describing *Democratic Energy* as multiracial and multi-class was not inclusive; that the word "diverse" would be more inclusive. I read this as a refusal to acknowledge the material persistence of race and class inequalities and a desire to collapse all difference into a less contrasting and conflictual terminology. One woman of color from a *Democratic Energy* organizing council in Boston explained that her small group tried to rework the mission statement so that it didn't have the word "multiracial" in it at all, because then it wouldn't be embarrassing to the organization since there are so many racial backgrounds that were not reflected in *Democratic Energy*'s membership. Others emphasized that this wording signaled that *Democratic Energy* aims to focus broadly – not just on wealthy communities. The organizer from Boston acknowledged that the mission statement was important as it stood, but that the organization doesn't look like a multi-race multi-class organization, and shouldn't kid itself.

At other *Democratic Energy* events, participants lauded a culture of inclusion in the organization's efforts. At one leadership training, an African American activist from Lynn expressed that one of his take-aways from the weekend was that this was a diverse group and that there was a comfort level with diversity that he appreciated – that it was no big deal. At another meeting, a Latino activist from Holyoke expressed that it was at *Democratic Energy*'s leadership trainings "where I really feel it's working in terms of diversity." Not surprisingly, people of color put race on the table with a clarity of purpose that is missing for whites, who often reveal the impoverishment of their privileged stances as they wonder what the necessity of articulating race is. Even among a white demographic that prides itself on being politically progressive, many whites still lean on the idea that racial equity has come a long way since the 1960s, asserting in numerous

conversations that racism is not really an issue, or if it is, it isn't really that bad, at least not around here.

This was clear in a conversation I had with Jim, the outreach and education coordinator at *Democratic Energy* and a white male volunteer, while tabling for *Democratic Energy* at an organic agriculture fair. We were chatting under a tent when the subject of Trayvon Martin came up. Both men agreed that things were much better these days in terms of racism: "they're not as bad as they used to be." In the conversation, I argued against their historical analysis, urging that we all think about whether things really are better and whether, as privileged whites, we are being apologetic about systems that are no less racist than before, they just exist in different forms. Jim responded with "yeah, but people didn't used to lock their schools or their communities, in terms of gated communities." For him, it was gated communities that presented a new and untenable social logic. When I offered that locks, chains, prisons, and reservations share the same logic of exclusion, fear, and dominance, and that these forms have been around since the beginning, I was met with a silence that was eventually filled when the two men moved on to other topics.

This conversation, and others like this that I participated in, are central to understanding the context of how local justice and sustainability organizations deal with race. The idea that gated communities are wrong, but that racism is not as bad as it was in the past shows that knowledge of systemic oppression is very thin among the privileged, even among those who see themselves as progressive, and who buy into a philosophy of sustainability and justice such as that which is promoted by *Democratic Energy*. Participants may be nodding at Carl Anthony when he proclaims that "we have to be

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more conscious and more conscientious in confronting the issues of race;" and people may be inspired by Van Jones when he cautions against environmental apartheid, but these analytical gaps in understanding issues of social equity and inclusion create a public that is top-heavy with privileged whites for whom equity is more about checking a box of performative sensitivity than digging in and ensuring equity in structure and process. For example, in a working group at *Democratic Energy*, one woman of color relayed to the group that in her neighborhood, it was very difficult to bring cloth bags to the supermarket; and that these are the kinds of things that privileged whites at *Democratic Energy* don't even think about. When the white men leading the discussion sat there in silence, it was another clear example that a stated willingness to address race and class inequality in sustainability and justice work is a far cry from actually bridging structural racism and the ignorance of the privileged, as members of the public work together on thinking through sustainability and justice.

While *Democratic Energy* managed to engage a conversation about race and class, gatherings were compromised by vastly different race and class world views that were not adequately bridged in discussions about renewable energy and energy efficiency. As Goodman writes: "Radical unevenness creates a temporal division between those for whom justice globalism is a matter of livelihood, literally of life and death, and those for whom it is simply a matter of living standards. . . Those who are insulated can permanently defer justice globalism by vesting hopes in short-term possibilities for charity, reform, and amelioration" (Goodman, J. 2009 , 507). Privilege, by definition, creates complacency – for it lessens the urgency to address equity, even where there is agreement that climate change affects everyone, and that disadvantaged communities are

the most vulnerable.

**Public Formation: Speakers and Audience**

Another way to describe the nature of this public is to talk about who was running the conversation and who the audience was presumed to be in each setting. At *High Road*, the discussions are guided largely by labor activists in collaboration with a couple of community activists. The audience is always open, but the intent is that the audience be labor groups as well as community groups. There are people of color who come now and again, but largely the space is white despite the fact that one of the founders was Latino and really sought to prioritize racial justice as one of *High Road*'s organizing principles. At *Green Net*, the conversation is run by work-force development professionals, and contractors; and the audience is largely assumed to be homeowners, contractors, and job seekers. This space is the most un-self-consciously white. Race is not on the table as an organizational imperative, and few people of color attend. *Green Net* is also the most male in terms of attendance and floor-time, though *High Road* doesn't do much better given the male-heavy demographics of labor organizing. *Green Net* attracts a lot of people in gender segregated fields such as engineering and contracting, despite the fact that quite a few presenters are women in education, city planning, and municipal sustainability positions. *Democratic Energy*, similarly to *Green Net* draws from a pool of contractors and homeowners looking to produce, distribute and purchase renewable energy and energy efficiency products and services. Because their mission includes social justice and race and class diversity, they draw a more diverse group in terms of gender and community organizing. Climate change teach-ins draw from a strikingly older crowd including many retirees who are concerned about the legacy they are leaving their

grandchildren.

All three of the case studies of this converging local network saw their role as providing spaces to convene a constituency. Sometimes the use of "community" in the field did not refer to the public, in terms of creating an intentional space for people to discuss sustainability and justice. This created another source of ambiguity between more or less publicly spirited interactions. When *High Road* members talk about community groups, for example, they are referring primarily to the leaders of community-based organizations. Subsequently, "community" more often than not becomes a stand-in for non-profits and their managers, tying *High Road* members to professional interests that are inherently conservative as they try to serve the interests of their organization, people-centered as it may be. At a food policy roundtable, for example, the director of a major food service organization expressed his thoughts at a rousing political conversation at *High Road* that day with the caveat that his views were not necessarily the views of his organization. He tried to balance his own view that the economy would be better off if people were given welfare money to spend on good food, and his professional imperative to be realistic about what his organization could offer a collective debate on food policy. His body language and his tone implied that he wanted to be part of the "get real" conversation that was happening at the roundtable that day, but that his organization could not take that political stance directly, despite the fact that it was addressing hunger. He began by saying: "The standard line is that these views may not necessarily be the views of [my organization]." And then he continued with a scathing assessment of agro-business and capitalism:

"It's a world of uncertain and challenging times – we're repeating history over and over – for example with the recent Farm Bill – which began chipping away at the SNAP program. In Massachusetts, we will lose $70 a month. That helps sustain the lives of 46 million people. The SNAP Program is the biggest fiscal stimulating program we have. Without SNAP we would be in a much tougher situation. If we put money in the hands of people who need it, they will spend it right away. Turning to agricultural policy – free trade agreements are still the holy grail. Any free trade will increase trade overall, but it changes the power distribution of the players. For example, it gives more power to multinationals so the farmer is left holding the bag. [Companies like] Monsanto have changed the nature of the food we eat. Now, there is a plethora of cheap unhealthy food. We have limited good, expensive food. We're faced with an unconscionable reality – 110,000 people in western Massachusetts rely on the emergency food system. This represents a failure of our society. We keep scapegoating the working poor instead of embracing a floor below which we won't go: allowing hunger in our country. Capitalism has failed to provide jobs and income security."

An anti-capitalist stance added to the conversation at hand, and this perspective was true to the participant's personal perspective. However, he had a professional obligation to clarify the distinction between his personal views and the organization that he was representing at the roundtable. He ended his political contribution with the words: "Ultimately we're a non-profit business, but we have a small role to play in making an impact" (FieldNotes *High Road* June 27, 2012). Examples like these indicate that the capacity of emerging publics to create a wedge in the face of market and state constraints suffers, in part, from a kind of NGOization, whereby organizations are more accountable to the institutional funding processes that support them than to the communities they serve. Organizational agendas are often shaped by an over-emphasis on professionalization and political neutrality, at the expense of democratic participation and community-based action (INCITE Women of Color Against Violence 2007). There are two kinds of conversations going on. One is a community conversation which is open and critically aware of things like the devastating impact of capitalism, corporatization, and

environmental injustice. The other is a professional conversation that is defined by the narrow focus of mission statements, and the conservative impact of non-profit imperatives to remain politically neutral and organizationally guided, not driven by interests that could be seen as individual, emotional, or radical.

In the following sections, I relay two ethnographic experiences that contrast with one another in terms of public participation. They each illustrate different tensions in the formation of a local public that centers sustainability and justice as its goals. One is the tension between a community of experts on the one hand and a community of concerned citizens on the other. The other is the tension between the formation of an emerging public that centers social justice and an emerging public that is driven by white, middle class interests. These stories underscore the frequent ambiguity or ambivalence with which public participation was solicited and integrated in local practices of knowledge sharing and imagining new futures. They also reveal that engaging with the complexities of social positionality, and fostering diverse publics is central to the issue of generating collective agency in emerging green publics.

### Ambiguous Publics: Community Forum or Expert Brainstorm?

At one event, a local planning agency invited members of the public to a "community energy 101 forum" to imagine road maps to a clean energy future. The event was publicized on *High Road*'s list serve, in the local newspaper, and on the website Local.com. It was written as an invitation to " a free community forum about new renewable (clean) energy and energy efficiency projects." The invite explained: "Participants will be asked to share their goals and ideas for clean energy in Amherst,

Easthampton, Hadley, and Holyoke. They will additionally have the opportunity to engage community and state on programs and ideas to support the local community." I emailed Jim, the community outreach facilitator at *Democratic Energy*, to ask if he was planning on attending. He responded by listing me on the *Democratic Energy*'s official invite request form for the event to which I replied in the affirmative. When I arrived on the day of the event, however, a list of pre-printed name tags did not include my name or Jim's, and it turned out that he had forgotten all about the event and had not followed through on communication with the event's organizers. Since it was a community event, I was given a sticker to create my own name tag, and I entered the community college conference room.

The room was prepped for multiple activities. In one section, chairs were arranged in rows facing a projection screen. In three other areas, chairs were set up in half-circles facing empty bulletin boards. There were a number of people milling about; all of them white, many in their twenties (a younger set than usually shows up at these events). Everyone in the room at this point was  wearing formal office attire: blue dress shirts among the men, dress pants among the men and women. It became clear that these young professionals were members of a German consulting group based in Boston that had been hired by the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center to facilitate tonight's forum. The forum's springboard is a regional climate action plan developed by a local planning board that was presented at *High Road* nine months earlier. The plan speaks especially to ways that local towns can improve and develop infrastructure to adapt to and mitigate climate change impacts.

I'm about ten minutes early and there are no other attendees yet. One of the consultants says hello and offers: "I'm not trying to kick you out, but if you want to go and do something else you can go and come back." It seems the group is nervous, and is not yet ready for community members to enter, even though the doors are open and a few more people are trickling in behind me. I respond, "thanks for letting me know" and then I am approached by another white woman who introduces herself as an employee at the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center. I ask her some questions about the event and the process, and she gives me long and thorough answers that are very abstract in substance and a little hard to follow in terms of how all the pieces and players fit together and what exactly the goals are. I gather that the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center is funded by the Department of Energy Resources of Massachusetts and that it is charged with working with communities to see what their needs and desires are around clean energy, as well as helping communities take advantage of programs and projects that MACEC offers – most notably the Green Communities Program. The Green Communities Program gives townships money for greening their communities –  by switching street lighting to LED lighting for example, or retrofitting municipal buildings such as schools, libraries and town halls. Of the participating townships tonight, three hold the designation of green community: Amherst, Easthampton, and Holyoke. I also gather that the MACEC is the one who hired the consulting group with funding from the Department of Energy Research in order to facilitate tonight's forum and in order to generate actionable steps that can be brought back to the communities to further clean energy goals. Both of the consultants and the Clean Energy folks have driven up from Boston,[2] a two-hour drive each way.

I sit down. Other attendees are trickling in. I recognize a farmer from a community supported agriculture farm I used to belong to as well as an organizer from a group that is trying to shut down a local coal plant who has given presentations at local climate change teach-ins and who knows the folks from *Democratic Energy* really well. We say hello and talk about the fact that Holyoke is the second largest solar producer in the state besides Boston. He tells me he is here in the context of being a board member of two local organizations — one, an energy efficiency company, and the other, a farm education center. He adds "I'm just a regular guy." I observe "there aren't a lot of regular guys here." He concurs, expressing that there ought to be given that this is billed as a community forum. Looking around, I am struck by how many suits there are; how many dress shirts and khaki pants. A homogeneity of clothing colors the room: gray, dark blue, khaki, and black. It is one of the most formally attired events I have been to, and the most white male. There are about 36 people in the room, of whom there are about 8 or 9 women. All of the women are white. From what I can see phenotypically, and from what I know based on previous connections and the introductions that come later, there are only two people of color in the room, both of whom are Latino.

A white man from the consulting group opens up the event. He stands up in front of the participants who are seated in rows in front of him. He seems nervous and doesn't connect well with the audience. He introduces the CEO of the planning organization, whose climate action and clean energy plan is the galvanizing focus of this gathering. This CEO talks to the audience about how this region is on the forefront of systemic change. His framework reveals the strong allegiance of the evening's facilitators to

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market-based logic and solutions. He says: "there is a triple benefit in long-range community planning for clean energy: economic competitiveness, a heavy load of economic security, and environmental awareness." He closes with a one-line invite for communities to weigh in: "This is about planning with the region, not for it" (Field Notes October 16, 2014).

Next, the Clean Energy Center Project Coordinator takes the stage and re-emphasizes the evening's focus on market-based approaches to climate action, this time from the perspective of state funding and project management. The Department of Energy Resources in partnership with the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, she explains, is helping out with this change-making process. Their focus includes job growth, innovation, market scale renewables and economic measures.

Lastly, the consultants from Boston take the stage again, this time narrowing the evening's focus from climate action to the development of clean energy infrastructure. They explain that the evening is about brainstorming the development of clean energy for the Pioneer Valley, and that this can be conceived of in mainly two ways: 1. as energy production like solar, wind, hydropower and also biomass or ground source heat and 2. As energy efficiency – citing examples of light replacement and high efficiency HVAC. While a climate action plan provided the starting point for this discussion, market-oriented goals for integrating new clean energy and energy efficiency products and services that can be funded by the state quickly became the focus.

At the same time, the language of "community" was peppered in to the goals and agenda of the evening. Making an appeal to community input is a way to capture the widest

possible set of ideas necessary to innovate change, while true public spirited debate that

might generate ideas that cut against state and market interests is sidelined by a process in

which consultants make the final assessment about which ideas to take seriously. The

introductions and structure of the event revealed this process.

At the end of the evening's introductions, the Boston consultant stated that "the idea

tonight is to get some ideas to bubble up and to put them in a road map for clean energy."

He explained:

> "After tonight, we will pick out 8-10 ideas and put them in a clean energy
> strategy. We will identify ideas and present them at a 201 forum. We will also
> bring in 2 or 3 experts. The idea is – what are the nuts and bolts of these
> technologies? What does it take to get them off the ground?" (Field Notes
> October 16, 2014).

While this goal seemed to be about discussing the feasibility of applying different

available technologies at the level of market viability and state funding possibilities, he

also added that another goal is to "get your community-specific concerns." This

facilitator did not clarify until the end of the evening that it was the consultants' job to

choose which ideas they would retain to re-introduce at a second forum (201), six months

to a year later. The "community," or the "public" would be sidelined from the process of

choosing which potential solutions were most important to them, while being given the

ostensible opportunity of welcomed  participation in state and market processes.

Interestingly, in the group exercises that followed, participants expressed a range of ideas

that did not follow the prescribed frameworks of state politics beholden to market

interests. Despite being an elite group of municipal employees and business owners,

many participants expressed that they did not want to, and did not think that "doing

business as usual" would solve any of these problems. There was a tension between the demographic of the participants which drew from local expertise in sustainability at the municipal and small business level, and which was largely white and male — and the politics of many of the individuals in the room — a politics which tended towards sustainability and justice principles; principles that are at odds with the dominant race, gender, and educational demographic of the room, as well as at odds with the market-based politics of the CEOs, state program managers, and consultants who were running the event.

The next part of the event featured a panel of three municipal workers and one energy efficiency company CEO who were members of a working group that are using the planning organization's climate action plan to think through regional solutions to infrastructure changes in clean energy and energy efficiency — especially at the municipal level, by taking advantage of state funding programs such as the Green Communities Program. They discussed their reasons for participating in the working group and told stories about the opportunities and barriers they have faced in facilitating changes in infrastructure in their towns, and in homes and businesses in the region.

The need for education is a number one issue, and interestingly, the panelists included themselves in this assessment. Despite the fact that they are in charge of sustainability programs in their towns, and are positioned as community experts, they also expressed the need for more knowledge about both "what's out there" in terms of possibilities and existing technologies, as well as the need for more face-to-face networking and communication. One participant offered: "There's a lot we don't know. We all have a lot

to learn from each other. Business as usual doesn't work anymore." Another participant, in charge of sustainability programs in her town expressed: "I'm coming from a place where I don't know where we need to go." And a third panelist noted: "I don't feel comfortable enough in this topic area myself" (Field Notes October 16, 2014).

While this "community" forum held these panelists up as experts, they themselves expressed a need and a desire to connect first, rather than sit in their offices trying to access state programs and technological expertise individually. Said one municipal sustainability officer: "It's not just sharing the ideas, but connecting and networking with others doing the same work. Instead of just seeing a name on emails – to see the person's face." While these regional infrastructure players named a need for collaborative face-to-face information sharing and networking, this "problem" is not often privileged in the work that people are doing on the ground. That is, people do not go on to engage in more dialogue — public formation is still relegated to the margins even as people are expressing a need for more participatory interaction and dialogue.

One of the goals of highlighting the significance of public formation in this research is to underscore that while a public is certainly in the making at all of these events whether they are more or less formal; or more or less inviting of the public at-large — the potential of this public-in-the-making is undermined by an ambiguous relationship to community input; an over-reliance on experts who are themselves searching for new knowledge; and a lukewarm engagement with what a public can offer. Publics can offer vibrant interactions that generate questions and ideas which stem from the exigencies of everyday life. These ideas can generate energy and solutions that go beyond the stale,

corporate, and inherently conservative interests of state and market processes.

In the next segment of the forum, the Boston consultants divided the audience into three working groups. Each group was led by one of the consultants from Boston. We were instructed to imagine what kind of a world the Pioneer Valley would be in 2035 according to our desires and interest in clean energy and energy efficiency. I participated in a group that included two of the panelists who had just spoken, the coal plant activist, two solar installers, a small business owner, and a professor of environmental policy. There were three white women (including myself), one Latino man, and four white men. The facilitator was a white woman.

Our group is lively, but it is mostly three men who speak – a solar installer from a worker cooperative, the CEO of the energy efficiency company that was showcased in the first part of the evening, and a local organizer. They play off of each other and at times, it is hard to keep up with them they have so many ideas. They brainstorm many ideas including implementing a fully functioning public transportation system that connects the towns in the region efficiently; channeling war money to energy; a coal-free and nuclear-free energy system; networks of clean energy educators; energy scores for all buildings; tying mortgages to energy efficiency standards; community greenhouses; the protection of independent food production including the right to own chickens — which is allowed in some communities such as Northampton, but forbidden in others, such as Holyoke; community-owned solar; regulations that require supermarkets to carry a certain percentage of local food; annual energy audits for buildings; a revolving fund for energy saving at the municipal level; carbon taxes; and a community garden in every

neighborhood.

The facilitator divides these brainstorms quickly into headings which she furiously scribbles onto sticky-notes that she posts on a bulletin board in front of us: "Clean Energy Financing," "Energy Independence," "Outreach and Education programs," "energy efficiency," "role of utilities," "public transportation for all." A gong sounds that startles everyone, and the groups are called to sit back in the rows of chairs at the front of the room. The three facilitators from Boston report back to the large group, distilling the room's brainstorms. Their reports are fast and abridged. The facilitator for our group relays that we focused a lot on paradigm shifts, highlighting the group's discussion on food policy as well as the group's interest in improving transportation connectivity and keeping resources in the community.

The event comes to a quick close in order to stick to the time limits. I stay in my seat a little longer than most, taking in the scene, when one of the panelists sits down next to me and asks "whaddya think?" I reflect back that it was interesting, and that I was surprised how many progressive ideas there were despite the formality of the event. He seemed surprised by my choice of the word "formality." Suddenly, as a researcher, I felt that I had misstepped. I had offended the integrity of the event by highlighting its alienating qualities in terms of social identity and state and market politics. It became clear that he did not think it was a formal event. He asserted: "the people here are on the cutting edge of this work," and he added that, "this is not really a public event, even though it is a community forum." Someone comes to say hello to him and he moves on, leaving me feeling that it is true, I wasn't quite invited, and this wasn't really a place to air

community concerns unless one was already perceived to be in the club of cutting-edge community movers and shakers. Those with professional skills and cultural capital, including white male privilege and engineering know-how have an easier time navigating this public, indeed, see themselves at the forefront of this public at the expense of seeing the value and hidden expertise of all stakeholders, especially those who are already experiencing the worst impact of climate change effects.

## Social Justice Publics and Potentially Fruitful Combinations of Knowledge

In the next excerpt, participants at a *Democratic Energy* leadership training discuss the gap between the organization's main mission to be multi-race and multi-class in its sustainability efforts, and the fact that its services often catered mostly to the middle class and to the wealthy. They also offered examples of projects and programs that would be more beneficial to low-income communities. In doing so, they pushed back on the organization in two ways — by emphasizing the limited nature of its appeal to a diverse public, and by offering knowledge rooted in everyday experience necessary for implementing sustainability projects that were also socially just. The following description provides a good window into the way that this work has the opportunity to be transformative and allow for a collective process of knowledge production that integrates multiple and intersecting forms of knowledge.

Participants sat in a semi-circle facing the facilitator in a large conference room with windows on three sides. The group included white male engineers, female activists, black entrepreneurs, contractors, upper class and middle class homeowners, working class renters, young students, and retirees. The mood was calm, and the feel of the event was

collaborative and friendly, though somewhat reserved.

In one session, the facilitator, Santiago, asked the group what brought them each to join *Democratic Energy*, and what they thought was important to consider in drawing more members into the organization. Encouraging a diverse membership that reflected the organization's mission turned on the issue of providing green energy products and services that made a difference to low-income people. The ensuing conversation highlighted the gap between the organization's goals to be socially just, and the way the organization's existing initiatives were inaccessible or inapplicable in low-income contexts.

One white organizer named Bob revealed that in his local organizing council in Worcester:

> "A lot of our [council] members are not necessarily [organizational] members yet. They get involved because of the prospect of green jobs, green jobs training, business incubation and skills. There's not enough for low-income folks to join . . . None of these folks own houses, few buy fuel. I became a member because I believe in the mission."

A Latina organizer named Elena from the same council added:

> "In the mission [of the cooperative] we say we're gonna be low-income and multi-race, but none of the services are for [us]. Low income folks don't own a house. Our priorities are survival day by day. . . None of the services are services that we can use. As people of color – we need jobs. A lot of people come so they can be owners, not so they can have a nice house. For us, these are luxuries, not needs."

The discussion proceeded quickly. People were empowered to speak and they shared their perspectives in an honest and straightforward manner. While issues of accessibility, relevance, and affordability had to be made explicit to the more privileged members in the group, there was an overall atmosphere of how important this conversation was,

especially in light of the organization's relatively unrealized commitment to social justice. Another organizer, a Black woman named Sabrina from a local organizing council in Boston expressed what the draw was for her, and how she tried to recruit people in her community to become participating members of *Democratic Energy:*

> "you realize you could own a worker coop – that's a good draw. I talk about green jobs. I talk about creating this new green local economy. We're changing the world by our actions and what we're doing in a cooperative fashion. There's the subcaste system of criminal records – if you have a felony conviction – these are unemployable people by normal employable standards. They need to keep the prison industrial system running. If we can create systems where people can get jobs or start their own business – that is the draw. That will be the thing that we sell the most on."

As the discussion progressed, participants built on these points to highlight other ways that *Democratic Energy* was not serving low-income needs and ways the group could benefit from more knowledge about how to tap into low-income realities. Elena from Worcester pointed out that:

> "The number one thing at [this organization] is still services. I don't know if that's what's gonna bring the multi-class. In rural areas, you can find a place to put solar. In urban areas, it's hard to figure out where to put panels."

Sabrina from Boston addressed some of the assumptions that had emerged in the conversation thus far, and pushed the envelope further in terms of imagining ways of doing things that would be sustainable and just:

> "Low-income people do own property. They do live in groups. There are things we can do to save money in the places where we live. We do need to address those issues for our aging parents — link house buying into the cooperative structure. [With a reflective laugh] I'm living the life of a hypocrite: selling all this stuff and then going home and turning up the heat in an uninsulated house."

A white contractor named Alex took this in, inspired, and reflected back:

> "Maybe we can find a multi-family property and make a model. Talk to landlords. These could be coops – it could be another business development."

Another white participant, a retired investment banker named Bill expressed that even non-members could take advantage of fuel purchasing, urging that:

> "There's a way for low-income people to get involved. Sometimes you have to be a little creative."

Speaking from his own privileged position, he told the group:

> "We have one low-income person in the Vermont council – I'm so proud of him – he sends in a $10 check once a month for three years to pay his membership. This is extra work for the bookkeeping department but we could do more of this. We had a couple of members take advantage of fuel buying membership which is $25 – they saved $300 on heating."

Jim, one of the main outreach and education organizers for *Democratic Energy,* confirmed that this previous comment reflected his own experience:

> "A number one benefit of joining *Democratic Energy* for me was the propane buying group – it saved me half of the cost."

Sabrina cut through the unexamined privilege embedded in these comments and made it clear that this was not as relevant to her constituency. She underscored the importance of thinking about the specific needs of different communities, especially underrepresented communities. She encouraged the group to imagine more product and service options to accommodate different realities:

> "that is of absolutely no use to people in Boston. We have to see what's gonna be the draw for each council. There's still a lot of home heating oil in Boston – we have to think creatively to connect to those people."

Elena pointed out the structural flaws inherent in the fact that the organization's headquarters were located in rural, western Massachusetts. She also spoke to the issue of

making the organization's services relevant to the needs of people in her community:

> "Solar panels in western mass – that works. We can't do that in Worcester. How
> do we find the product or service we can provide in our communities that will be
> the carrot? The monopoly the energy companies have on the cities is huge,
> especially in communities of color. If it's electric or whatever it is, we need
> someone with engineering knowledge to have a products and services meeting in
> Worcester. I'm not an engineer and I'm not retired. I don't have time to learn
> about it and do all the research. We need someone who's retired and has time to
> come to my council and talk to my members."

A retired White male engineer named Lance responded affirmatively to this class analysis

about the differences between the organization's council constituencies, their needs and

their resources. He muttered an emphatic "mmm hmm," and expressed that he was

willing to share his expertise as part of the cooperative structure of the organization: "We

can do that." At the same time, he also articulated that he felt he knew what was most

realistic for the cooperative in terms of structuring projects:

> "Green jobs are great jobs but they're geared toward energy – solar, energy
> efficiency.  We are an energy cooperative. All things *do* need to be related to
> energy somehow."

Santiago, the facilitator, referred back to the comment made by Alex, the white

contractor, that people could talk to their landlords about improving energy services,

underscoring the difficulties of including renters in the products and services offered at

*Democratic Energy*:

> "My landlord lives in Boston and he still doesn't follow the City of Holyoke
> ordinance for recycling. There's no way he's gonna do anything about energy."

Santiago focused on a different solution — that of looking at public and private initiatives

as a way in for the cooperative to jump start their own projects:

> "In Holyoke, there's money for smart growth that's coming down the pipeline.
> This is an opportunity for *Democratic Energy* to install solar hot water on new

developments."

This idea inspired Lance to speak to what he saw as the strength of the organization:

> "One of the things *Democratic Energy* does very effectively is incubate businesses.  Biodiesel – we need to use Biodiesel. Energy Efficiency – we need to use energy efficiency. We have to keep in mind 'how is the cooperative gonna keep delivering benefits back to its members?'"

All this talk about making the organization's products and services accessible and relevant to low-income people had Bill shaking his head in frustration:

> "green and cheap – those two words are a problem – green is not cheap.  It costs money to put these solar systems in.  Without some incentive or rebate from the state, your electricity will be more expensive."

Elena agreed, but from a different angle — offering a way towards solving this problem and not just naming it, or ceding to state and market constraints:

> "it's not affordable to be green – it's not an option for us low income people.  I want to buy green even though it's more expensive, but I want it to be affordable.  That's where we need to come together.  That's the reason why we're in a coop because we can not do it alone."

The discussion above reveals how people in the field were trying to tackle issues of sustainability in tandem with issues of justice in terms of participation; in terms of envisioning clean energy product availability and services; and in terms of building collective knowledge. People came to the table at *Democratic Energy*, not just to participate in the development of green products and services, but to figure out how to do this justly.

A diverse public is crucial for sustainability that is socially just. Without a range of actors from different kinds of social and professional positions, and the knowledge and

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experience that comes from these positions, the issues put on the table are too narrow and do not reflect the range of public issues that need to be tackled. In this excerpt alone there were many issues that were articulated as important to the work of making sustainability just: the lack of engineering knowledge in low-income communities; the stranglehold of energy monopolies; the vulnerability of aging communities; the severe constraints of felony histories on employment; landlord accountability; and the relevance and accessibility of different kinds of energy products such as propane buying groups, energy audits, and solar panel installations.

What did not happen was a process of capturing those issues in an organized way. This conversation was full of interesting ideas and dynamics. There were a lot of gems that could have been unpacked or retained for further consideration and development. The issue of affordability and relevance remained as a conceptual issue to be addressed, but the specific issues were not charted as a way to map out the ways in which sustainability and justice intersected, and what kind of specific work could be done to address access, affordability, relevance, and disenfranchisement in particular contexts. Significant knowledge production was left unrecorded and unmoored.

This process revealed the centrality of participatory justice in defining the issues to be tackled in any local process of enacting sustainability. The diversity of this particular group enabled an in-depth engagement with social justice issues that were missing in other settings in the work of this organization; settings in which privileged members garnered outsized influence in the organization, positioned to realize sustainability goals that were dependent upon the purchasing power of other privileged homeowners and

upper-middle class consumers such as themselves. It also revealed that being conscious

of the nature of knowledge production in organizing might be an important way to

incorporate and integrate diverse perspectives and ideas. An equitable approach to the

knowledge that inheres in different perspectives and levels of expertise is key, as is the

ability to recognize the value of that knowledge and to find ways to retain and develop it.

The mission of justice and sustainability drew participants in, but it also left them

somewhat hung out to dry, especially if they were low-income, if they were trying to

organize in low-income communities, or both. The most effective part of this process was

the kind of relationships between people that this conversation produced. At this

leadership training, the process of citizens coming together to tackle the matter of

sustainability and justice was participatory, respectful, and reflective of diverse views

brought to bear in a relatively non-hierarchical way. It represented an important wedge;

an important manifestation of the intention to create participatory publics engaged with

sustainability and justice.

**<u>Conclusions</u>**

Latour asks, "What new associations are being made?" This emerging public has great

potential in terms of the new associations that are being made between activists and

engineers, and privileged and vulnerable communities. Democracy "defines members not

simply by virtue of the actual participation with which they engage in determining social

possibilities, but also by the potential participation that remains open to them if need so

arises" (Dewey 2012 (1927): 23). *High Road* and *Democratic Energy* are democratic in

this sense: potential participation always remains open.

Although the doors are technically always open, the inclusiveness of these emerging

publics is not great. This public is despairingly segregated by race and class, and thus

deeply flawed in its potential to emerge as a democratic public given that climate change

affects everyone, and that those most marginalized in terms of resources and

representation are most vulnerable to the environmental and economic impacts of climate

change. Those who have more professional skills have an easier time navigating this

space. The structure and process of this public is problematic both in terms of its

demographic structure and in its ways of conceptualizing the problems at hand. Often,

it's a public of experts more than a civic space. Many come in their role as professionals,

on the clock, paid for their participation. The way that power is being built in this

emerging public relies too heavily on these unacknowledged power structures of race,

class, and professionalism.

In spite of this, participants at *High Road* and *Democratic Energy do* make a wedge

between the state and the market. The interactional work that *High Road* and *Democratic*

*Energy* and others are doing continually opens up forums for the public to engage issues

of sustainability and justice.

Yet, even where conversations are more or less inclusive and equalizing, the power and

benefit of the diversity of people and perspectives is not always realized or effectively

harnessed. And this impacts the issue of inclusion. As political theorist, Calhoun writes:

> "The issue of democratic inclusiveness is not just a quantitative matter of the
> scale of a public sphere or the proportion of the members of a political community
> who may speak within it. While it is clearly a matter of stratification and
> boundaries, inclusiveness is also a matter of how the public sphere incorporates
> and recognizes the diversity of identities that people bring to it from their

manifold involvement in society" (Calhoun 167).

These publics are fragile. They have great potential as sites of democratic participation, as fluid sites where a range of actors network together in the service of change; exchanging and shaping new forms of knowledge. They are also vulnerable to professionalization, to cooptation by the corporate state, to a logic of market capitalism, to the reproduction of race and class inequality, and to "diminishing horizons of possibility" (Kathleen Blee 2012).

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[1] A solar installation deal that Democratic Energy offers whereby installation costs are cut by offering to help others install their systems and accepting volunteers as part of the installation team.

[2] Later, when I research the consulting company, I find out on several professional websites that the CEO got his start as a sustainability entrepreneur with the chemical engineering company, BASF, a company with egregious human rights abuse history; and as a press relations officer for environmental affairs in the German federal government. Based on reports and mission statements, I understand that one of the driving principles in his consulting leadership is that environmental solutions have to be generated at the intersection of state, market and civil society. Key to his approach is the idea that "change can only be sustained with the willing support of those it impacts, and that cutting edge communication and participation strategies are essential to help clients shape and manage change." As it reads in the online reports and polished company profiles, and as was evident in the way the community forum I attended was structures, rather than generating ideas from the ground up, this process is one of offering the public ways to participate in ideas of infrastructure change that are generated, guided and funded by the state and by markets. The public comes in last. I see this as states and markets implementing participatory processes as a form of appeasement rather than dialectical engagement. The state and the market remain the main players in this approach.

**CHAPTER 7**
**CONCLUSION**

Almost a century ago, sociologist C. Wright Mills talked about the promise of sociology to help people tackle the thorny ways that our biographies as individuals come up against the constraints of history and social structure. He asserted that if we use our sociological imagination to see the impact of structural, contextual, and procedural constraints — many of which are socially constructed in the process of organizing our lives along social, economic, and political lines — then we have a chance at liberating ourselves from the constraints, and we have the potential to assert more agency upon our lives.

In the social justice tradition of C. Wright Mills, which centers the question of humanity and freedom, sociology asks a few key questions: "What are the social structures and processes that constrain or enable human agency?" "What is the tension between individual agency and social structure?" "What kind of relationships are people placed into with one another as a result of a given social structure or process?" As a researcher, these are the questions around which I circle. And these are the questions that shaped the way I looked at the data in this dissertation.

Climate change modifies the age-old tension between individual agency and social structure. In the words of actor network theorists, climate change is a non-human actor. That is, global warming and its effects shape social experience and social action; it is a node in a vast network of both human and non-human relationships that shape people's lives. The effects of climate change on people create unthinkable constraints that extend far beyond conventional understandings of social structure; and likewise, it catapults

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agency far beyond the frameworks of pre-existing social theory.

With climate change, we are all wearing the shoes of a planetary predicament that pinches at our very existence. Nation-states continue to make plans to grow their economies by robust percentages, setting their goals firmly on securing access to oil, gas, and coal to produce the energy necessary for these economic projections to be fulfilled. The logic of global business and economics is firmly attached to the notion that this kind of development can go on ad infinitum to the benefit, especially, of those at the top of race, class, and caste hierarchies, an increasingly smaller bunch. The science is clear. This direction is no longer tenable. However, as Latour and others argue, our social and economic institutions are ill-equipped to address our planetary predicament, not least because they are thoroughly tied up in the logic of extraction, exploitation, oppression, and limitless burning of fossil fuels.

In response, many individuals and groups around the globe argue for paradigmatic change — both in terms of the technologies that propel social and economic life, as well as the very logic of production, consumption, and exchange upon which nations base their local and global economies. Some argue that sustainability can be addressed within capitalist modes of production — that climate change will innovate new technologies and open up new markets for green products and services. This is the dominant approach to climate change knowledge (Jamison 2010). Increasingly however, an emergent discourse of climate change underscores social justice as central to the problem of sustainability. Many see that the problem of climate change is intimately bound up with the issue of

human rights; with unjust and untenable extractive and exploitative economic practices; with the right of people to sustain themselves and future generations; with corporate accountability for destructive environmental impacts; with nation-state accountability to their citizens; and with procedural justice in terms of ensuring equitable and fair processes of global decision-making. Climate change presents a very challenging issue to organize around, particularly for those who center justice as central to sustainability goals. Addressing justice in tandem with sustainability demands a scale of change that is virtually unprecedented in human history, despite historical examples of significant cultural and technological change such as for example, the shift from slave economies to wage economies; or the invention and mass distribution of electricity (Klein 2014a).

This dissertation is an ethnography that details the emergence of a local climate change public. It tells a story about the activities that people are engaged in on the ground as they seek to engage the problems of climate change and work towards a sustainable and just future. In applying ethnography as the main methodological tool, this study is able to reveal the specific meanings and questions that participants bring to their social activity, documenting the nature of the questions and issues that people are grappling with in the face of climate change.

But an ethnography is not just a story about people's lives as told through their perspectives. It is not merely a tool for the thick description of specific social contexts and time periods (Geertz 1973). It is also a process through which a researcher engages the questions and ideas that drive people's lives through the lenses and frameworks of her

own specific, and theoretical questions.

In the beginning of my research, I struggled to find ways to understand the social activity I was witnessing regarding climate change. The concept of publics allowed me to see many different kinds of activity as a case of a public in-the-making. That is, in the interactional processes of organizational activity, conversations, fairs, product and service development, and outreach, people were drawing from existing discourses, and they were also in the midst of creating new ways of envisioning and enacting social and economic practices. New climate change publics were forming around the globe, and I wanted to study the emergence of one such public on the ground.

As I carried out this research process, two main umbrella questions drove my analysis. One was the question of agency. I began from a place of simple intrigue: "people are talking about justice and sustainability — what is happening?" And my questions started from a place of simple interest: "what are people doing? How are they doing it?" As I spent more time in the field, and participated in conversations and meetings that ranged from envisioning the future; to understanding specific technologies; to strategizing action steps that might make a difference, these questions became a little more complex. I wondered: "what kind of impact do community interactions have? What kind of knowledge is produced, and to what end?" I was particularly interested in understanding publics and agency in terms of the discursive commitment participants expressed to ideas of sustainability and justice.

This question about agency started from a premise that is embedded in the academic literature on publics; that is, that the promise of publics is their agentic potential. Because publics are not necessarily bound by the constraints and exigencies of market and state, which tend to favor maintaining the status quo in terms of global outlook and modes of action, participants have the potential to effect greater agency — starting with discourse and moving through to action. If social change is to be generated, it generally starts in the civil sphere, through the discursive mobilization and collective action of movements and the publics in which they participate (Melucci 1993; Emirbayer and Sheller 1998). It is through their interaction in the networks of activism and debate that constitute publics, that people have the potential to both imagine something new through collective knowledge production; and to generate collective action. Furthermore, the potential of publics leads to another kind of agency: collective agency. Climate change is a force and a reality which ultimately positions humanity in a situation of extreme, total constraint. Publics are moving, participatory, democratic entities that can shape the ability of the whole — that is the collective, to be agentic in the face of potential destruction.

In the field, I found that agency was far from automatic. In fact, it was a hard-won attribute. The emerging publics I studied were themselves struggling with questions of agency — specifically with the bridge between knowledge and action as documented in chapter 5; and the connection between sustainability and justice that I document in chapters 3 and 4. The question of exactly how to effect action was a persistent one, and many of the participants in my ethnography expressed an ongoing frustration about wanting to bring knowledge sharing and knowledge production about climate change to

the next level.

And so I began to ask questions about method, with Dewey as a point of reference. Dewey's political commitment to, and faith in publics as motors of democracy motivated him to focus on method as the problem of the public. It is in thinking about method that we can further pinpoint the issue of agency. Method is one of the answers to agency. Dewey highlighted how part of the issue of agency lies in thinking through participatory decision-making processes. He emphasized the importance of ordinary citizen participation in the knowledge production that inheres in public discourse. That is, both professional and technical experts, as well as lay experts in daily life, economics, and well-being need to be part of the conversation. The shoe-wearer knows best that the shoe pinches and where, while the shoemaker may be able to remedy the situation in technical terms.

In thinking about where agency is located in emerging publics, I asked what might enable publics to be agentic and what might be constraining them (as *collective* entities, in terms of *collective* agency). Based on my observations, I found three tensions that constrained this emerging public. These included the tension between sustainability and justice in the discourse itself; the tension between expert knowledge and lay knowledge, and likewise, experts and lay people; and the tension between a socially-just intention to be welcoming and inclusive on the one hand, and a persistent reality of stratification, on the other, that mirrored the region's steep segregation along lines of race and class.

The promise of these emerging green publics is that they are mobilizing and engaging a discourse of sustainability and justice that is not only relegated to the margins. People in the mainstream are talking about social justice as integral to sustainability. This dissertation shows that the use of this discourse has staying power. This is heartening.

At the same time, people are not really engaging the relationship between sustainability and justice, and often, this phrase glosses over the very real injustices in the existing processes that people reach for as solutions — especially those that are about individual consumption and the generation of green businesses whose primary goal is market-growth. Green capitalism is not going to save us (Klein 2014c).

One of the main arguments of this dissertation is that publics will need to engage the relationship between justice and sustainability more intently. Justice is not going to come from making better shoes for those who can afford them. Neither will it arrive by just slipping the concept in as a discursive ingredient. The discourse of sustainability and justice is driving local movements for change. These local movements retain and use these discursive ideas. Yet, at the same time, they do not focus adequate attention on what this relationship means. More time is spent discussing science and technology, and available products and services than what the link between justice and sustainability would look like at every turn: in terms of consumption, energy distribution, policy, and technological development. I argue that emerging publics must take justice and sustainability from discourse to practice, working through the ideas embedded in the language more directly, more thoroughly — always bringing it back to whether a

framework or a strategy or a project is just. In this way, the logic of extraction, consumption, and limitless growth can be countered by the questions that drive a new paradigm: what is going to work for people? For the earth? For families? For children? For subsequent generations?

I found that the nature of knowledge production was both an area that could both enhance the potential agency of publics and constrain them. People came together to share knowledge. This was empowering and served to grease the wheels of public formation and public agency. Yet, at the same time, a real tension between knowledge and action remained. The data shows that people in these emerging publics spend an inordinate amount of time talking about technical specifics — about new "shoes" that are more efficient and green. The experiences of members of the public, and especially the knowledge they bring to bear, is sidelined for expert knowledge that is not sufficient to address both the political problem we have on our hands (in the sense that we are all dependent upon state and especially market structures that are unsustainable), and the imagination problem (in the sense that it really is going to take all hands on deck to both think and act our way out of this planetary predicament).

I argue that this tension can be attributed in part, to the inability to see the way that expert knowledge plays too much of a starring role in a process in which there is so much knowledge still to develop; in which our very survival depends on the successful development of new knowledge and the successful cross-fertilization of knowledge. Part of the answer of agency, I argue, is in underscoring the value of non-experts — as a group

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— and as a process. That is, emerging publics can potentially have more agency if they elevate the engagement of non-experts as a group, while also valuing the knowledge production that inheres in those of us who are wearing the shoes, not just looking to apply our engineering skills to the making of new shoes; and in the context of climate change, that includes everyone.

The promise of the findings in this research is that if we can see the constraints in the way that publics engage the discourse of sustainability and justice; if we can see the constraints in the way that expert knowledge is held in higher esteem than the knowledge that inheres in all of us as everyday citizens of the earth; if we can see the constraints that inhere in the way in which these emerging publics reproduce the structures of race and class segregation endemic to this country, then we can work to change the way we participate in restricting our agency. We can create the vibrant publics that Latour argues are key to engaging the complexities of climate change.

As I was finishing up this dissertation, I was invited to attend an event at the University of Massachusetts in which delegates from Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi met with researchers at UMASS to share their work and interest in understanding climate change and sustainability issues, with an eye to producing research collaboration between the two universities.

I was struck by stories that were shared during our meeting together: of needing masks to

breathe the air in New Delhi and Beijing, and by a flooding disaster that caused 10,000 people to perish in Uttarakhand, India. These stories were told in technical terms, complete with graphs showing the specifics of flood devastation, as well as the national security interests tied up in coal production and the transportation of oil through pipelines that traverse politically contentious regions of the globe. The presentations lacked a certain quality of moral outrage and urgency. As one UMASS professor expressed, climate change vulnerability and environmental degradation are not hypothetical futures, these environmental, and environmental justice issues are here with us right now.

This event raised a lot of questions for me about the goals of researchers studying climate change and its social and environmental effects — and especially about research ethics. What do we think is our responsibility as researchers and knowledge producers in terms of the implications of climate change and its relationship to economic systems of production and energy use?

Along with seemingly politically neutral common interests such as "population vulnerability" and "flood management," I think that researchers need to be engaged more deeply with the fact that climate change knowledge is devastating, and that it calls us to make some political choices. Climate change in particular, puts us on the spot in terms of politics, and yet, taking a stand, or having goals that come up against such enormous power interests is no easy prospect.

I believe it is incumbent upon researchers to get clear in our collaboration with each other

about how to be not only effective and accurate knowledge producers and disseminators, but socially responsible ones as well. As such, I think we are called to spend time not only documenting what is, but imagining other ways of doing things -- everything from basic economic life to nation-state energy flows. And this cannot only be a researcher's prerogative.

I hope that the implication of this research shows, in part, that social science research can help put social justice on the map; can help validate the role of emerging publics in generating new knowledge and new strategies to change the direction in which we are headed. I hope that in clarifying the productive potential of social processes of knowledge production, emerging publics can become more vibrant in terms of their structure and their internal democracy; and in terms of being sites and processes for the cross-pollination of diverse ways of knowing. Ultimately, we are all participants in a global imperative to share and produce knowledge, know-how, and new ways of being[1].

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[1] The French concept of three types of knowledge is relevant here: savior (knowledge), savoir-faire (know-how), and savoir-etre (knowing how to be — ways of knowing)

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