



## **Environmental Justice CSU Justice Roundtable Series**

### **EJCSU Roundtable Brief #3 Energy Justice**

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*This brief is based on the Environmental Justice Roundtable Series hosted by the Environmental Justice Working Group (formerly EJCSU), which is supported by CSU's School of Global Environmental Sustainability's (SoGES) as one of its Global Challenges Research Teams (GCRT). The series began on February 12, 2015. For more information about EJCSU, please visit their website at: (<http://environmentaljustice.colostate.edu/>)*

*This document is part of a series of roundtable briefs highlighting how environmental justice is conceptualized, discussed, researched, and put into practice locally, regionally, and globally. The purpose of these briefs is to highlight the variety of contexts within which environmental equity and justice (EEJ) frameworks are imperative. In particular, the goal is to emphasize the transdisciplinary nature of EEJ, highlighting common themes and differences of interpretation and application that emerge in the EJ community at Colorado State University and among additional colleagues in our network. This particular roundtable brief is focused on issues of EEJ in water research and policy.*

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SCHOOL OF GLOBAL  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
SUSTAINABILITY  
Colorado State University



ENVIRONMENTAL  
JUSTICE CSU

# ENERGY JUSTICE

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION



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This Energy Justice Roundtable is hosted by Environmental Justice CSU. Future roundtables will explore equity and justice across a range of issue areas including the climate, energy, and biodiversity and ecosystems. These informal roundtables are intended to facilitate the formation of transdisciplinary teams that can produce innovative research and teaching on environmental equity and justice.

Friday  
**APRIL 22**

3-5pm

Lory Student Center Room 322

[sustainability.colostate.edu/events/energy-justice](https://sustainability.colostate.edu/events/energy-justice)

Hosted by Environmental Justice CSU,  
a School of Global Environmental Sustainability  
Global Challenges Research Team



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Colorado State University

## **Executive Summary**

The “Energy Justice” roundtable discussion on April 22, 2015, was the third roundtable event in the Environmental Justice CSU Roundtable Series. Panel members included Cary Weiner (Energy Specialist, Colorado State University Extension), Sarah Romano (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and International Affairs, University of Northern Colorado), Stephanie Malin (Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Colorado State University), Dimitris Stevis (Professor, Department of Political Science, Colorado State University) and David Ciplet (Assistant Professor, Department of Environmental Studies, Colorado University-Boulder). Stacia Ryder, the Environmental Justice CSU Program Coordinator, and Stephanie Malin co-led the discussion on issues of equity and justice in energy development.

The discussion began with introductions from each panel member. They drew from personal experience with energy-related issues to help direct the conversation through a number of themes. David Ciplet opened the conversation, discussing his research on procedural justice and equity within decision-making processes in energy development. Sarah Romano followed, introducing local issues of unconventional oil and gas development in Greeley, Colorado. She encouraged the participants to think about the role of universities in decision-making processes and what types of expertise are valued in these processes. Cary Weiner reflected on his experience in the field as a practitioner and shared his beliefs on the current “energy revolution”. Dimitris highlighted the importance of “just transitions” within these energy revolutions, to ensure equal distribution of costs and benefits. Stephanie finished the introductions reflecting on the perceptions and contested illnesses of local communities exposed to the hazards of resource extraction and energy development.

We then invited an open discussion following the introductions. This discussion developed three main themes in energy justice. These included: 1) Justice for marginalized communities; 2) Equal distribution of decision making power; and 3) Responsibility through the entire life cycle of the production process.

Other themes that arose in the discussion included issues related to the role of the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC), transparency of the energy industry, deregulation, renewable energy transitions, and economic growth. Justice issues were highlighted in all stages of energy development. This included the planning process, extraction activities, and post-extraction and restoration processes. Important questions that were proposed within the roundtable conversation included:

- Who should have a seat at the decision-making table?
- Who should be held responsible for environmental and health outcomes, even after extraction ends?

- How do we ensure that equal opportunities exist for everyone to transition to more sustainable energy development?
- What is the role of researchers and universities in energy development?
- What are the barriers to green transitions?
- How has energy related information been translated or diffused to the public?

Participants drew from diverse disciplines and experiences to address these topics. For example, expertise in political science gave insight into issues of procedural justice and experience with community activism provided narratives of social movements. Participants were able to share multi-scalar examples of energy justice on local, national, and global scales.

### **Event and Panelist Introduction**

The third roundtable of the Environmental Justice CSU Roundtable Series hosted Cary Weiner (Energy Specialist, Colorado State University Extension), Sarah Romano (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and International Affairs, University of Northern Colorado), Stephanie Malin (Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Colorado State University), Dimitris Stevis (Professor, Department of Political Science, Colorado State University) and David Ciplet (Assistant Professor, Department of Environmental Studies, Colorado University-Boulder). Apart from the panel participants, this event attracted 20 attendees. The audience included students, professors and residents from Larimer County. Attendees brought expertise in sociology, political science, journalism, law, social movements and other fields for rich discussion on energy just related issues.

Stacia and Stephanie began the round table with an introduction to the Environmental Justice CSU group, highlighting how our Global Challenges Research TEAM (GCRT) works to identify key questions of equity and justice in the six SoGES focal areas.

### **David Ciplet— Environmental Studies Program, CU Boulder**

David opened the roundtable discussion by explaining the issues of justice and equity he focused on in his research. The first topic he discussed was climate justice and false solutions. He defined false solutions as policies that *“are built as clean energy or renewable energy policies, that either aren’t really clean energy or renewable policies, or have not really taken into account certain impacts or disproportionate impacts on largely marginalized groups”*. David focuses on bottom-up movements to understand how marginalized groups can shift international climate change policy processes. He specifically looked at the way informal recyclers, or “waste pickers”, were able to influence renewable energy or clean energy policies,

such as the “Clean Development Mechanism<sup>1</sup>”. His book *Power in a Warming World: The new global politics on climate change and the remaking of environmental inequality*, written in collaboration with Timmons Roberts and Mizan Khan digs deeper into this phenomenon.

More recently, David has become interested in the concept of “energy poverty”. He identified the lack of access to energy as both a contributor to poverty and an indicator of poverty. He then raised the moral question of how we should address this issue. He encouraged attendees to think about more equitable solutions by asking, “*What does it look like if we actually do care about meeting the energy needs of the many people who don’t have energy access, but what if we do it in a way that has their participation in what those solutions look like?*” Within the theme of energy poverty, his most recent research focuses on Native American communities, specifically the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota and the Navajo Nation. This research aims to define energy access, energy ownership, design best management structures and identify the barriers communities face in creating these opportunities.

***To see more about David’s work, check out his profile on the Environmental Studies Program page [here](#).***

### **Sarah Romano—Political Science and International Affairs, UNC**

Sarah Romano shared about her research related to procedural equity within environmental governance. Her particular questions of interest include: 1) Who participates in environmental decision-making and how?; 2) Who is excluded from that decision-making?; and 3) What are the processes through which social actors seek greater inclusion? Since 2004, Sarah has applied these questions to water management processes in Nicaragua, most recently focusing on community-managed water systems in rural areas and how community-based groups have sought more formal inclusion in water policy making.

Since moving to Colorado in 2013, Sarah has become involved in research around oil and gas development. Her current project investigates the 2011 University of Northern Colorado (UNC in Greeley, CO) decision to lease its mineral rights and the response from faculty and staff. The research developed two years after this decision was made, when university faculty and staff formed a task force to look into the issue. Sarah joined the task force, which aimed to “research the potential environmental, health and safety and wellbeing impacts of drilling near campus.” She engaged in auto-ethnographic research, using participant observation, surveys and

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<sup>1</sup> David defines this as a renewable energy subsidy organization, that was funding private clean and renewable energy projects around the world as a way to offset emissions of the wealthier countries. This concerned waste pickers as it threatened their work, so they were able to band together across countries and continents in order to have their input on the project considered.

interviews to understand the main concerns of the campus community in relation to environmental equity and justice. She found there were many concerns over the financial and health outcomes as well as the procedural aspects of this unanimous Board of Trustees decision. Two main questions this research addressed were: 1) What is the role of universities in energy development? and 2) What type of expertise is valued in decision-making around energy and fossil fuel development?

Reflecting on the latter question, she shared her experience at UNC:

*“Not surprisingly the response at UNC was very cautious as a form of activism. It was very tempered as faculty and staff. But one thing that surprised me is that we have faculty who were very quick to say, ‘I am not an expert on fracking.’ And this was a group of biologists and geologists and political scientists and people from the humanities as well. But I wondered, to what extent how we silo our own expertise undermines how we might act collectively on a complex and multidimensional issue like fracking? We represented a very interdisciplinary group. People say, ‘I am not a fracking expert’, but in some sense we all were on different dimensions of this issue.”*

Sarah highlighted the dismissing and devaluing of grounded knowledge and expertise in regards to equity and justice. Again drawing on personal experience, she gave an example of a city council member in Greeley dismissing community concerns as “emotional.” Her final comments stressed the importance of acknowledging different vantage points in regards to oil and gas development in order to achieve equity and justice.

***In fall 2018, Sarah will begin a new faculty position in Political Science and Global Studies at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. To see more about Sarah’s work visit her website [here](#).***

### **Cary Weiner—CSU Extension**

Cary Weiner, an energy specialist, shared his experience as a practitioner working with Colorado State University (CSU) Extension. The mission of CSU Extension, an arm of CSU as the land grant university in Colorado, is to help Coloradans make more informed energy decision. They provide outreach in the form of workshops and webinars and provide a clean energy curriculum for middle and high schools. In his role, Cary provides extension publications, fact sheets, financial calculators and decision tools for landowners to make these informed decisions. One of his main projects includes a ‘community energy assessment’, what he describes as “*a whole town energy audit.*”

Cary's interests lie in the idea of *energy democracy*. He is concerned with the question of how well the democratic bodies that manage and govern energy development are working. Additionally, he is interested in the lens through which they manage and assess energy development; whether or not they are looking at things holistically, by assessing economic, environmental, health and justice issues. Narrowing his focus to one of the governing bodies, he posed the following question to participants, *"How does local control of oil and gas regulation work with the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission and state regulation? Is not allowing for local control problematic from an environmental justice point of view?"* Before wrapping up, Cary shared his opinion on the future direction of energy development, stating, *"We are kind of in an exciting time where some of the economic interests and financial interests are aligning with environmental interests as clean energy moves forward in Colorado and throughout the country... I do think we are in the middle of a transition and in fact an energy revolution."*

**To see more about Cary's work, click [here](#) or visit the CSU extension webpage [here](#).**

### **Dimitris Stevis— Political Science Department, CSU**

Dimitris Stevis shared his interest in political economy, governance, labor and the environment. He is currently involved in a multinational collaborative project assessing how workers and community adapt to green transitions. Dimitris is conducting a comparative study, between the United States and United Kingdom, examining the role of workers and unions in what is called *'just transition'*. He discussed the origins of the just transitions movement, born out of the 1970s and inspired by the GI Bill. He outlined how the concept evolved through the 1980s and 1990s, particularly due to the role of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers' Union in the politics of the Superfund. Dimitris considers just transitions as *"a necessary strategy to ensure that the environmental and social inequities of the green transition are contained... and that some places and people do not enjoy the benefits of the green transitions at the expense of somebody else"*. Through empirical research, he strives to answer the following questions: 1) What does "just transition" mean? 2) Who is covered by it? and 3) How does one balance social and environmental justice?

While answering these questions, Dimitris and his collaborative research team are searching for best practices of just transitions around the globe. In order to do so, he explained, one must *"capture the political power networks and chains that cut across communities, across labor unions, across environmentalists, across the globe, so that we can identify who is responsible and who is vulnerable"*. The future direction of this research is to identify which policies and at what level these policies should be implemented in order to achieve change. Wrapping up his

introduction, Dimitris invited the roundtable to continue discussing future action and policy development in the open discussion context.

**To learn more about Dimitris' work, visit his website in the CSU Political Science Department [here](#).**

### **Stephanie Malin—Department of Sociology, CSU**

Stephanie began by introducing her research in uranium milling and mining communities in the Four Corners region. She specifically highlighted her research in communities such as Monticello, Utah, investigating the uranium legacies that remain. Since 2006, she has worked closely with Monticello community members, documenting the injustices in their uranium development experiences. Stephanie explained that despite designating Monticello as two Superfund sites, community members are still fighting for legitimization of the health problems they are now experiencing due to sustained uranium exposure. This is even after elevated rates of cancer, up to 200%-300% higher than other locations, have been identified.

Expanding this issue to a larger context, Stephanie identified other parts of the United States dealing with similar problems, such as the Navajo Nation. In her recent book *The Price of Nuclear Power: Uranium communities and environmental justice*, she elaborates on the perspectives of local communities, specifically focusing on how residents of local communities feel about the possible revival of uranium as the new renewable bridge fuel. *"The surprising thing is,"* she shared, *"some communities really support this. And it is because of these cycles of economic dependence and dependence on natural resources in these really impoverished areas where people are constrained to accept those sorts of activities."*

Additionally, Stephanie described her research as co-PI of a National Institute of Health study, which looks at how energy development can have health implications for local populations. She conducted interviews, surveys, and community studies to understand the changes in quality of life and stress levels from living near oil and gas development. While measuring health outcomes, she is interested in the way these outcomes are recognized and how risk is perceived.

*"If people are experiencing health problems related to these energy production systems, in what ways is the burden of proof put on community members rather than on industry? Or on the particular company to show what the health effects are? They can be substantially time consuming... and maybe never really be legitimated by the industry or the company... Also risk perception. What we think of this risk and why we talk about risk a lot but don't really have a way of implementing community level concerns over risk in our own state. What can we*

*do to maybe have a precautionary principle be more of a component of this setting?"*

Stephanie is interested in moving towards more community-level energy management in the future. She explained that by shifting the scale at which energy is produced and governed to a smaller or regional context, we could increase the level of awareness of energy consumption.

***To learn more about Stephanie's work, visit his website in the CSU Sociology Department [here](#).***

### **Open Discussion**

Following these introductory comments, the discussion was opened to all participants. The first topic that arose was the injustices imposed on marginalized communities, both minorities and low income populations. The vulnerability of these communities is exponentially higher, including risk of deportation, therefore limiting their opportunities to respond to these injustices. A roundtable attendee reflected on her experience as a public advocate for marginalized communities and shared stories of her experience as a representative for them in court. She stressed the importance of her role because of their inability to speak up themselves. Stephanie Malin drew from her recent research working in a predominately Latino community in Greeley to relate to this theme:

*"For reasons of feeling vulnerable, even though we assure confidentiality and amenity, there was such a low participation rate. Even through people wanted to talk a lot about how they felt informally."*

Following the discussion of community empowerment, the relationships between "just transitions" and green transition opportunities were addressed. A major concern of participants was the lack of consistency in employment opportunities. Cary Weiner highlighted that renewable energy development can open numerous employment opportunities initially, but that there is not necessarily a "one-for-one" long-term trade-off in the transition from fossil fuels to renewables. Dimitris applied the concept of just transition to a local context, asking what obligations Fort Collins has to Craig, Colorado. He highlighted the need for new policies to properly handle these situations and avoid externalizing the costs. Michele Betsill, from the Political Science Department at Colorado State University, built on Dimitris' idea, suggesting that just transitions are both moral and political issues. Without proper political coalitions, ensuring justice in the transition can be challenging.

The current political economy was highlighted as a major barrier to energy justice. Participants discussed the way it structures our conversations and limits the choices we can make. Deregulation was discussed as a possible solution to overcome some of these problems. Cary reflected on his outreach experience as a practitioner in Colorado,

*“I think we are seeing somewhat of a natural deregulation happening, at least in the electric utility industry in Colorado and elsewhere, with these third party solar providers. You know? The Solar City and Sun Run are really, in some sense, replacing the utility in a sense that they are now installing rooftop solar. And you know, selling that equipment and electricity to consumers directly and bypassing the utilities. So it is interesting that this is happening in this highly regulated environment still in Colorado. And it is also based on a financial model that allows people to go solar for no money down. And so it is allowing a much broader participation in that movement. So, it is interesting to just think about how that is happening in the current structure.”*

During the roundtable discussion, many negative outcomes of oil and gas development surfaced. This includes both short and long-term health, environmental, and financial issues. An important question that arose is, *who is responsible for addressing those outcomes?* Stephanie shared her experience researching contested illnesses in Utah and explained how the financial burden had fallen on local communities. Peter Hall, an affiliate professor of Sociology at Colorado State University, highlighted the dangers of corporation bankruptcy and lack of long-term commitment from gas developers,

*“We are in the middle of a similar kind situation in which there are oil and gas companies that are selling out their Colorado properties. That are firing people. That are declaring bankruptcy. And the latest estimate is that this decline in production will be the worst that it has been in a long time and that it will decline and not come back. And so environmentally, and in terms of justice, we are going to face the problem of the idle wells. And the company has gone bankrupt and the bonding doesn’t do diddly, so someone is going to have to pick that up and check those idle wells.”*

Another recurring theme throughout the discussion was the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC). Participants’ reflections on the COGCC were not necessarily positive. Tara Shelley, a faculty member then at the Sociology department at Colorado State University, referred to her research on citizen’s attitudes around the COGCC. She found that there were low levels of satisfaction with the COGCC and that most all citizens, even those that would be

expectedly support the COGCC, were “not very complimentary about it”. Later in the discussion, another participant shared a similarly negative perspective stating,

*“In terms of democratic practices and policies, the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission doesn’t fare up very well. And our congressman made a statement there in January in a hearing that they had ill-served communities and people. So the problem is that we can empower people on a local level but the power is at the state and national level. And if we are going to change that, we have to have some of that in terms of state government in this case.”*

The discussion concluded with thoughts about growth and economic development. Market-based economic development and growth were problematized by many participants. However, Cary suggested it can be useful, as solar energy created thousands of new job opportunities in Colorado and that solar was one of the leading industries that did not decline during the recession. Economic development was also highlighted as a problem because of the infinite growth it encourages. Infinite growth is unsustainable and can have detrimental environmental impacts. For some participants, population growth created concern for the future. However, energy use per person, and not necessarily population size, was suggested to be the larger problem. David Ciplet shared his thoughts on growth:

*“What I hear you speaking to is the idea of GDP being hegemonic. The only thing we care about. Which has measured prisons the same as schools. Which is that we need to measure wellbeing in a really different way. And I tend to feel that we are at the crux of challenging, and not just in a democratic and republican way. I do feel like there is a political moment that sees, and not just from an environmental stand point, but that sees what our whatever indicators we are using to measure wellbeing and how we are doing, people don’t believe it. And I hope that growth can be part of that conversation, in terms of, you know, that this is how we can measure how we are doing with one indicator which doesn’t take into account equality. Which doesn’t take into account environmental elements.”*

With that, the roundtable event concluded. Over the two hours, important issues and strategies were discussed to improve energy development both regionally and globally. Academic, social, and political level movements were highlighted, all working towards a more just energy development approach. Barriers and new opportunities were identified. Future directions of energy development were overall positive.