Power to the People:
The New Energy Democracy

Sept. 5, 2017 | 6:00 – 8:30 PM | Venture Cafe
The Boston Area Sustainability Group (BASG) brings sustainability-minded professionals together to share, to learn, to make connections, and to further our collective body of work.

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Our Speakers

- **Penn Loh** Director of the Master of Public Policy Program and Community Practice for the Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning, Tufts University
- **Alex Papali** Green Justice Organizer, Clean Water Action
- **Jennie C. Stephens** Professor of Sustainability Science & Policy & Associate Director of the Global Resilience Institute, Northeastern University
Energy Democracy & Renewable Energy Transformation: Strengthening Resilience by Redistributing Power

Boston Area Sustainability Group
September 5, 2017

Jennie C. Stephens, Ph.D.
Dean’s Professor of Sustainability Science and Policy
School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs
Associate Director of Strategic Research Collaborations
Global Resilience Institute, Northeastern

Northeastern University
Global Resilience Institute
A novel concept & emergent social movement

Connects energy system change & social change

- integrates concerns about environment, climate, & social justice income inequality, racism, distributed wealth, human rights

- envisions an alternative model of shared, distributed wealth new legal & governing structures, community-based rather than corporate control
Energy Democracy in Opposition to Energy Dominance

"Together, we are going to start a new energy revolution - one that celebrates American production on American soil. We want to make our goods here, instead of shipping them in from other countries."

Trump signing an executive order on energy  March 28, 2017

Nationalist, masculinist oligarchy or corporatocracy
Transformation is necessarily disruptive
Resistance from powerful entrenched actors inevitable
Disruption creates opportunity for social/political/economic/cultural change

Fossil fuel based energy systems

Renewable based energy systems

Not a simple technological substitution
Social, political, economic, cultural & institutional change too
Response to:
- growing inequities racial & socio-economic
- unequal distribution of impacts of energy & climate
- political power of fossil fuel industry

Alternative vision to fossil fuel dominated systems ..... 
most profitable industry in the world 
characterized by income inequality - failure to distribute wealth 
top 5 CEOs make 400X median income 
supported by public resources - $14 billion in tax breaks and subsidies 
intentional misinformation campaign on climate science

Energy democracy movement part of inequality movement, social justice, black lives matter movement, human rights movement, etc...
Democratization & Decentralization of Energy

Power is centralized – not just the grid - but control, management, and influence is concentrated among powerful energy companies

Fossil fuel subsidies 6x renewable subsidies - regressive
- $409 billion compared to $66 billion (IEA, 2015 World Energy Outlook)

Fossil fuel industry has strong connections to entrenched actors huge political influence

Growing social movement for local, community control of energy
- Like local food movement –
- Boulder ‘Decentralize, decarbonize and democratize energy’

Mothers Out Front: Mobilizing for a Livable Climate
“It is time for a swift and complete transition to clean energy”
Some energy experts embracing holistic view of energy and how energy systems Anti-racist activists embracing technocratic energy issues into their agenda

Big E – mechanized, quantifiable, phenomenon deployed with industrial technology defined by highly educated white men “energy experts”
small e – qualitative force socially embedded and mediated by people’s relationships with each other and with the conditions of their daily life.

Energy Democracy Visions & Discourses

A Redefinition and Re-envisioning
Rethinks political power through energy power

- Energy consumers → Energy citizens
- Energy commodities → Public goods
- Energy infrastructure → Public works, common resources
- Corporate control → Public/community control
Diverse Perspectives on Smart Grid

Tension:
Social change vs Technological Change

Tension:
Centralization vs. Decentralization

Tension:
Radical vs Incremental Change

Huge opportunity for broader civic engagement in energy system change
Divergent Priorities

**Enhanced Centralization**
- Large-scale renewable generation with extensive long-distance transmission

**Incremental Change**
- Enhanced efficiency and reliability
  - More efficient use of resources
  - Distribution network improvements for integration of distributed generation

**Radical Change**
- Carbonization generation, control and cultural change

**Energy**
- Community-based generation and distribution
  - Focus on social changes

**Democracy**
- Enhanced efficiency and reliability
  - Decentralization
Energy Democracy Policy Goals (Sweeney 2013, 2014)

• Resist the dominant energy agenda
  ▫ Fossil fuels remain in the ground, halt expansion
  ▫ Protect labor and others reliant on fossil fuels
• Reclaim the energy sector
  ▫ Democratize and localize energy businesses
  ▫ More public and community control
• Restructure the energy sector
  ▫ Community ownership
  ▫ Energy governance as commons
  ▫ From growth to wellbeing and sufficiency

Redistributing Power:
Electrical Power but also Political & Economic Power

- Assumes distributed energy sources & technologies enable and organize distributed political power and vice versa.

- Renewable energy systems offer a possibility but not a certainty for more democratic energy futures.

Energy Democracy vs Energy Dominance

“Together, we are going to start a new energy revolution - one that celebrates American production on American soil. We want to make our goods here, instead of shipping them in from other countries.”

Trump signing an executive order on energy  March 28, 2017

Nationalist, masculinist oligarchy
Aggressive attack on “social justice warriors”
Abuse of power – challenges to democracy
Energy Dominance vs Energy Democracy

Opposing Visions of Distribution of Power

Energy Dominance: current phrase describing the federal government’s energy goals

Rhetorical shift from “energy independence” to “energy dominance”
Focus on fossil fuel extraction and export – renewables absent

President Trump has declared

“a golden age of American energy dominance”


June 28th meeting with governors to discuss “energy dominance”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Energy Democracy</th>
<th>Energy Dominance</th>
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<tr>
<td>Future-oriented: focused on transition</td>
<td>Nostalgic: focused on reclaiming a mythical past</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community control</td>
<td>Centralized control (oligarchy or corporatocracy)</td>
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<td>The public good (fair and equitable employment, new governance institutions, fewer environmental externalities)</td>
<td>Good for the few (primarily white men of European descent); bastardized meritocracy</td>
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<td>Shared political voice</td>
<td>Unstable voice of masculine power; totalitarianism; doublespeak</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Fixed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustainability, efficiency, conservation</td>
<td>Wanton disregard for the commons</td>
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*Adapted from Professor Jen Schneider, U of Idaho 2017*
Resilience Framing:

Strengthening resilience means reducing vulnerabilities

Preparing for....
  Adapting to.....
  Learning from.....  DISRUPTIONS OF ALL KINDS

Sudden abrupt disruptions and slow emerging disruptions

Concentrated wealth and power creates vulnerabilities
Resilience in an Age of Growing Inequality?

- Energy systems (like so many other systems) are perpetuating inequalities unless they are intentionally advancing justice.

- Research on inequality and minimizing suffering of vulnerable populations central to resilience.

Diversity brings different Risk Perceptions
The “White-Male” Effect (Finucane et al 2000)

Finucane et al 2000

Figure 1. Mean risk-perception ratings by race and gender. Source: Flynn et al. (1994). Reprinted with permission.
Acknowledgements
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Thank you!