

SMAART SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULE

March 7th-8th

Levis Center 210

March 7th

9:00-9:30- Introductions ([Jessica Greenberg](#) and [Jamie Jones](#))

Panel One 9:30-11:00

Chair: [Sara Bartumeus Ferré](#) (School of Architecture, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*)

[Omar Pérez Figueroa](#) (Urban and Regional Planning, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) “Governing Water in a Changing Climate: Local Struggles and Policy Pathways”

[Akima Brackeen](#) (Architecture, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) “HOT + COLD: Infrastructural Interventions for Collectivity and Care”

[Graeme MacDonald](#) (English, *University of Warwick*) “Future Curation: Climate City Speculative”

Coffee 11-11:30

Panel Two: 11:30-1:00

Chair [Linda Larsen](#) (School of Labor and Employment Relations, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*)

[Lauren Becker](#) (City of Carbondale) “Energy Sovereignty: By the People. For the People.”

[Nina Idemudia](#) (Center for Neighborhood Technologies, Chicago) “Reimagining Climate Futures: Intersectional Narratives for Justice and Resilience”

[Scott Tess](#) (City of Urbana) “Renewable Energy Four Ways in Urbana”

LUNCH 1-2:30 (For conference participants)

Panel Three: 2:45-4:45

Chair [Xinyuan Dai](#) (Department of Political Science, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*)

[Matt Soener](#) (Sociology, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) “Beyond the Growth Fetish: Political Economic Drivers of Climate Change in an Age of Stagnation, Inequality, and Austerity”

[Andy Jonas](#) (Human Geography, *University of Hull*) “Comparative place-based approaches to sustainability transitions and circular economy in structurally disadvantaged European cities”

[Jamie Jones](#) (English, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) “Energy Transition and the Politics of Heritage”

4:45-6:15: Reception

7:00 Dinner for Conference Participants

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March 8th

Panel 1 9:00-10:30

Chair [Pollyanna Rhee](#) (Department of Landscape Architecture, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*)

[Rebecca Oh](#) (English, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) “Infrastructure: The How of Climate Futurelessness and Futurity”

[Chloe Ahmann](#) (Anthropology, *Cornell University*) “Futures after Progress: Imagining “Renewal” in Late Industrial Baltimore”

[John Levi Barnard](#) (English, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) “Theses on Climate Change and Cultural Study”

10:30-11:00 Coffee

Panel 2: 11:00-12:30

Chair [Marc Doussard](#) (Urban and Regional Planning, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*)

[Valentina Orioli](#) (Urban Planning, *University of Bologna*, Municipality of Bologna) “The EU 100 Cities Mission Seen from Bologna”

[Rebecca Walker](#) (Urban and Regional Planning, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) “Planning urban climate justice: risk, resilience, and repair”

[McKenzie Johnson](#) (Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) “The Politics of a Just Energy Transition in the United States: Technology, Infrastructure, and Society”

12:30- Lunch for Student Attendees

More About Our Panelists

Panel One 9:30-11:00

Chair: [Sara Bartumeus Ferré](#) (School of Architecture, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*)

[Omar Pérez Figueroa](#) (Urban and Regional Planning, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) “Governing Water in a Changing Climate: Local Struggles and Policy Pathways”

Abstract

Dr. Pérez Figueroa presentation will explore the governance challenges and policy dimensions of water systems in Puerto Rico in the face of a changing climate. His research examines the role of small rural water systems in Puerto Rico, highlighting their significance in shaping the island’s water governance amid persistent infrastructure and environmental challenges. Additionally, he will present insights on how communities in Southern California perceive extreme weather events and the ways in which the National Environmental Policy Act has influenced local environmental justice outcomes in Puerto Rico. By bridging these regional perspectives, Dr. Pérez Figueroa will shed light on the intersections of community resilience, policy frameworks, and climate adaptation in water governance.

Bio

Omar Pérez Figueroa is an Assistant Professor of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He is dedicated to supporting underrepresented and disenfranchised communities in addressing environmental inequalities, particularly those impacted from extreme weather events and water injustice issues. At UIUC he is also an affiliated faculty member with the Center for Latin American & Caribbean Studies and the U of I Urbana-Champaign Institute for Sustainability, Energy, and Environment (iSEE). He graduated cum laude in 2010 with a Bachelor of Social Sciences from the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras. In 2011, he was awarded the Truman Foundation Scholarship, which he used to complete a master’s degree in water, Interdisciplinary Analysis, and Sustainable Management from the University of Barcelona. He later completed a PhD in Environmental and Urban Planning and Public Policy at the University of California, Irvine, supported by the Ford Foundation. He’s current research sets at the intersection between climate justice and housing, public policy participation and urban design.

[Akima Brackeen](#) (Architecture, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) “HOT + COLD: Infrastructural Interventions for Collectivity and Care”

Abstract

HOT + COLD: Infrastructural Interventions for Collectivity and Care This presentation explores the intersection of water access, climate change, and infrastructure, highlighting how historical discriminatory practices have shaped contemporary

disparities. By linking past injustices to present challenges, it examines how speculative design, experimentation, and imagination—particularly through small-scale architectural interventions and design studios—can address systemic neglect and reimagine infrastructure as a tool for climate adaptation and social equity. Through critical engagement and design, this work envisions equitable water infrastructure that prioritizes resilience, justice, and wellbeing. Essential to this work is understanding the power of storytelling in reframing cultural narratives and the exploration of various sites throughout Chicago, IL. where joy and creativity become acts of defiance, underscoring the cultural significance of water and its role in shaping our collective futures.

Bio

Akima Brackeen is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Through research and design, she explores the impact, engagement, and the narratives of urban waterscapes within the built environment. She is focused on examining material culture and radical imaginaries of Black communities, in order to reveal the social, political, and ecological nuances of water access. Ongoing projects span architectural interventions, digital tools, and oral histories. She has an MArch from University of Michigan and a Bachelor of Arts in Architecture and Community Design from University of San Francisco

[Graeme MacDonald](#) (English, *University of Warwick*) “Future Curation: Climate City Speculative”

Abstract

My talk at the SMAART symposium will detail some recent work in practice-based climate futuring. I'll reflect on my experience on three intersecting projects focussed on the cities of Glasgow and Coventry, where I live and work. The projects used speculative methods from theories and techniques of futuring to worldbuild distinct climate imaginaries of the climate-changed city: a museum of the future 2050s called '[Carbon Ruins](#)'; a digital app, called [VIDI](#), of alternative climate-transformed scenarios in iconic city landscapes, and a co-created visual artwork, an abstract painting called '[Memories of a Future City](#)', which visualised Coventry's radical transformations from the mid 19th Century to 2123. All the projects were developed and presented to a variety of publics and stakeholders, including COP delegates and museum audiences, academics, schoolchildren, churchgoers, politicians and the general public. They manifest in digital and physical forms: art and museum exhibitions, i-pad apps, school curriculums, live performances, academic and open lectures, media items and other forms. I'll use the time at SMAART to introduce the work but also to reflect on the viability of specific futuring methods, their adaptability and feasibility for different spaces and places and their limits, challenges and possible alternatives.

Bio

Graeme Macdonald is full Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick, UK. His teaching and research reach across Petrocultures, Energy Humanities and Climate Imaginaries. He is a longstanding member of the [After Oil](#) collective. He was recently PI on 2 funded projects relevant to SMAART: Low Carbon Scotland and [Climaginaries](#). He is presently part of the [Eutopia](#) Environmental Humanities connected community, working with Nova U Lisbon, TU Dresden and Ca' Foscari (Venice) universities. He is Arts lead for Warwick's Sustainability Spotlight on Research.

Panel Two: 11:00-12:30

Chair [Linda Larsen](#), School of Labor and Employment Relations, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*)

[Lauren Becker](#) (City of Carbondale) "Energy Sovereignty: By the People. For the People."

Abstract

Energy Sovereignty | By the People. For the People. In the heart of Southern Illinois, a partnership that crosses partisan lines has developed. The City of Carbondale, population 21,471 and the Village of Dowell, population 364 are collaborating with the goal to better the lives of their community members. Their route? Pairing agriculture with publicly-owned solar and traditional storage technologies.

Bio

Rural-raised, Becker hails from the agricultural Driftless region of Southwestern Wisconsin. She is honored to call the village of Blanchardville, population 800, her hometown. At her core she cares for the land and the people that taught her to be diligent and community-centered. This care translates seamlessly to the spaces she's discovered professional fulfillment. As a community-focused environmental geographer, Becker's professional approach is best described as gathering tools. Tools to engage in dialogue, collaboration, and deliberate action.

[Nina Idemudia](#) (Center for Neighborhood Technologies, Chicago) "Reimagining Climate Futures: Intersectional Narratives for Justice and Resilience"

Abstract

This session examines the transformative potential of narrative and community-based approaches to climate justice in an era of accelerating environmental change and systemic inequities. Drawing on extensive professional expertise and the legacy of the Center for Neighborhood Technology's work, the presentation highlights how centering the lived experiences of marginalized communities can catalyze innovative policy reforms and sustainable practices. Integrating insights from environmental science, social justice, and grassroots activism, the talk outlines practical strategies for

reconfiguring collective responses to climate challenges. Attendees will be invited to explore an interdisciplinary framework that reimagines climate adaptation as a process deeply intertwined with social equity and systemic transformation.

Bio

Nina joined CNT in September 2023 as CEO. As a native Detroiter, Nina understands firsthand how the built environment shapes the lives of society's most vulnerable populations. This fuels her passion for empowering people to be change agents through urban planning.

Previously, she served as Chicago Recovery Plan Director for the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, where her primary focus was to ensure equitable grant distribution across 11 critical program initiatives supporting Chicago's economic revival. In addition to overseeing a staff of 19 and dozens of delegate agency contracts, Nina helped create and lead a data management and impact team to create new standards for how the department analyzes its economic investments for equitable outcomes. She has also helped to lead MUSE Community + Design, where she served as Director of Planning, and has previously served as a planner for the City of Los Angeles. Nina specializes in equitable community development, inclusive outreach strategies, and organizational innovation for planning agencies.

In 2021, Nina was elected the first Black President for the Illinois Chapter of the American Planning Association and now sits on the National Board of Directors. She was also recently reappointed by Major Brandon Johnson as a board member of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, the MPO for southeast Illinois. Nina is also an adjunct professor at the University of Illinois Chicago College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs. Nina is a graduate of the University of Michigan and the University of Southern California.

[Scott Tess](#) (City of Urbana) "Renewable Energy Four Ways in Urbana"

Abstract

Illinois is the focus of intense market development for renewable energy, with Federal and State policies pushing rapid acceleration of renewable energy deployment and increasing competitiveness of renewables in both wholesale and retail markets. Nonetheless, there are opportunities for local government to remove barriers and entice additional renewable energy developments. This session will describe four ways that the City of Urbana has advanced renewables at the local level including renewable energy credits, bulk solar, community solar, and bulk geothermal programs.

Bio

Scott R. Tess is the Sustainability & Resilience Officer for the City of Urbana, IL. He supervises the commodities recycling program, co-manages the Landscape Recycling Center, and is responsible for working with the Sustainability Advisory Commission to implement the City's energy, water, and waste priorities. Scott is also responsible for managing and redeveloping the City's closed landfill as a solar farm. Additionally, he leads the City's resilience efforts with a focus on continuity of operations and urban biodiversity. Scott earned his B.S. in Environmental Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and his Masters of Planning from Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida.

Panel Three: 2:45-4:45

Chair [Xinyuan Dai](#) (Department of Political Science, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*)

[Matt Soener](#) (Sociology, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) "Beyond the Growth Fetish: Political Economic Drivers of Climate Change in an Age of Stagnation, Inequality, and Austerity"

Abstract

Climate change is inextricably linked with our economic system. Proposals for reducing carbon emissions center on what might be called the "growth question." Decarbonization strategies include calls for "Green Growth," a "Green New Deal," or for "De-Growth." However, "growth" should not be taken for granted or fetishized. It is an abstract concept and statistical construct. Focusing on whether growth is sustainable or not as well as how it might be transformed overlooks underlying institutions and social relations – *how* growth works and *who* it works for. This talk reframes some of these discussions based on a critical political economic perspective. I will discuss my research findings showing climate change is driven by capitalist exploitation and global power asymmetries in trade and finance. Not only are these conditions a more precise way of explaining growth; they are a more precise way of explaining the reality of uneven and *stagnating* growth that is compounding these socio-economic and climatic problems. By moving beyond the growth fetish, I hope to clarify the current conjuncture. Addressing the climate emergency should go hand-in-hand with empowering labor and restructuring the global monetary order to rectify global inequalities.

Bio

Matthew Soener is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Illinois – Urbana/Champaign. His work is centered on political economy and focuses on financialization, globalization, climate change, and the state.

[Andy Jonas](#) (Human Geography, *University of Hull*) "Comparative place-based approaches to sustainability transitions and circular economy in structurally disadvantaged European cities"

Abstract

In this presentation I reflect upon place-based approaches to sustainability transitions and circular economy in structurally disadvantaged cities (SDCs) in Europe. SDCs are characterised by geographical remoteness, long term industrial decline (e.g. in fishing, port activities, etc.), disused industrial infrastructure, relatively high unemployment and weak economic governance structures. Although there is growing scholarly interest in urban sustainability transitions in globally connected entrepreneurial cities, relatively little attention has been paid to SDCs likewise undergoing sustainability transitions to Net Zero around renewable energy and the circular economy. Here I reflect on two recent research projects undertaken in European maritime port SDCs. The first project examined six maritime port SDCs located in three countries across the North Sea region (UK, Denmark and Germany) that have recently attracted nationally significant offshore wind energy developments. We found significant local and regional variations in the timing, scale and sustainability of green energy transitions, which in turn reflect place-based differences in urban climate alliances and counter-alliances. The second project (funded by the EU) focused on social and spatial aspects of the circular economy in cities and regions across Europe. By promoting the recirculation of material resources and improving neighbourhood social infrastructure and services, such as refill, repair, re-use and recycling, the circular economy promises to make cities more environmentally sustainable and socially resilient. In a case study of public, private and non-profit sector approaches to a circular economy in Hull, a SDC located in the North East of England, we examined the geographic distribution of socio-economic benefits from local circular economy developments. 'Top down' policy goals of Net Zero economic development and just transition were not accomplished. Nonetheless, attachment to place provides opportunities to bridge sectoral, neighborhood and jurisdictional boundaries and potentially generate more socially inclusive and human-centred territorial-distributional outcomes.

Bio

Andy Jonas is Emeritus Professor of Human Geography at the University of Hull. His research examines urban sustainability, the circular economy, and the geopolitics of city-regionalism in the USA, China and Europe. Recent books include *Urban Geography: A Critical Introduction* (Wiley, 2015), *Handbook on Spaces of Urban Politics* (Routledge, 2018) and *Handbook on the Changing Geographies of the State* (Edward Elgar, 2020).

[Jamie Jones](#) (English, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) "Offshoring: Energy Transition and the Politics of Heritage"

Abstract:

An offshore wind farm is rising off the eastern coast of New England in the United States in waters that were plied two hundred years ago by laborers in the proto-energy industry of whaling. Nantucket, an island thirty miles off the coast of Massachusetts, is a wealthy summer resort defined by its central place in whaling history. Offshore wind is

controversial on Nantucket, but the debates about renewable energy infrastructures do not exactly fall into the familiar patterns of NIMBYism one might expect from a wealthy coastal retreat. Conversations about offshore wind on Nantucket are being routed through proxy conversations about the island's whaling history and the endangered whales in its waters today. This paper explores the politics of cultural heritage and the uncanny returns of industrial history in this debate about energy transition.

Bio

Jamie L. Jones is an associate professor in the Department of English and a Helen Corley Petit Scholar at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. A scholar in the environmental humanities, Jones researches the cultural history of energy and oceans. Her first book, *Rendered Obsolete: Energy Culture and the Afterlife of U.S. Whaling*, was published by the University of North Carolina Press in 2023. Jones's work has also been published in journals and publications such as *Limn*, *Configurations*, *The Dial*, *American Art*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and the *New York Times*, among others. She is currently at work on two projects: a cultural history of nineteenth-century U.S. petroleum extraction, and a cultural history of shipping and logistics focusing on the Strait of Gibraltar.

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March 8th

Panel 1 9:00-10:30

Chair [Pollyanna Rhee](#) (Department of Landscape Architecture, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*)

[Rebecca Oh](#) (English, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) “Infrastructure: The How of Climate Futurelessness and Futurity”

Abstract

This talk will offer “infrastructure” as a crucial keyword for thinking about possibilities for climate justice in the face of entwined colonial pasts and climate futures in the global South. Building on LaDuke and Cowen's thesis that “infrastructure is the *how* of settler colonialism,” this talk proposes that infrastructure is the *how* of climate futurelessness and climate futurity. Infrastructures are structuring forms that shape how things will go, and they bring together both hard, physical components and soft, nonmaterial systems that structure the effects of built things. In postcolonial contexts, infrastructures are particularly important to climate futurity and climate justice because they are prime biopolitical mechanisms, mediating access to resources, access to space, and experiences of time.

This talk will make a case for the centrality of infrastructure through two contrasting examples. The first considers the role of water infrastructure in Cape Town during Day Zero, when the city was predicted to run out of water. During Day Zero, a new apocalyptic scenario for the city's upper and middle classes met and echoed the kind of water scarcity that has long plagued Capetonian townships. I show how such an "Anthropocene conjuncture," where climate futures meet the settler colonial past, plays out in K. Sello Duiker's novel *Thirteen Cents*. In the novel these longer histories are also entwined with an uneven history of state-based infrastructural expansion, so the novel combines an apocalyptic vision of climate destruction with a history of utopic desires for political and social inclusion centered around access to water infrastructure. I contrast this with a discussion of Idrissou Mora-Kpai's documentary *Arlit*, set in northern Niger. In *Arlit*, material and temporal foreclosures arise from uranium mining, which concentrates death in the town while yellowcake is sent to France to power clean nuclear energy. The film emphasizes the way environmental transitions are already perpetuating older colonial structures, and the way futurelessness is imposed through infrastructure. These objects suggest that climate justice must account for colonial legacies and the challenge of decolonizing infrastructure.

Bio

Rebecca Oh is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Illinois. Her first book, *Reading Better States: Utopian Method and Environmental Harm in the Global South*, is forthcoming with Fordham University Press in December 2025. Through a utopian method of reading, it shows how postcolonial states in South Asia, Africa, and the Pacific are imagined plurally, as both bad actors and sites of intervention that can support better futures in the face of environmental harms and climate change. She is in the early stages of a second project on apocalypse, genre, and infrastructure and her work has appeared in *Interventions*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Ariel*, *ISLE* and other venues.

[Chloe Ahmann](#) (Anthropology, Cornell University) "Futures after Progress: Imagining "Renewal" in Late Industrial Baltimore"

Abstract

How do people in post-industrial landscapes relate to the future once trajectories like progress reveal themselves to be untenable? What might their experiments in hoping at the end of things teach us about the futures we might reasonably desire in the face of ecological apocalypse? My work takes up these questions from the vantage point of South Baltimore City, following debates among neighbors over a proposed incinerator, billed as a "climate solution" and euphemistically called the Fairfield Renewable Energy Project. In this talk, I interrogate the promise of renewability that propped up the proposal. As an orientation toward the future, renewal turns on a redemptive dream: a yearning to rewind the ruination wrought by progress. In exploring how this dream structured hope for technocrats and elder white folks in the neighborhood, who called on an acutely toxic past to figure the incinerator as the best among a set of lousy choices, I

show that renewal sets up a speculative world that limits aspiration to the plausible. I also gesture toward youth organizing against the plant, which offers us a glimpse into the hard work hoping bigger takes, and reflect on lessons learned from their campaign the kind of imaginative work that climate justice asks of us as people and as scholars.

Bio

Chloe Ahmann is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Cornell. Much of her work is set in Baltimore, and considers what efforts to think and enact environmental futures look like from the sedimented space of late industrialism.

[John Levi Barnard](#) (English, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) “Theses on Climate Change and Cultural Study”

Abstract

This talk will elaborate several theses on the relation between climate and culture, highlighting how climate change impacts the study of culture and the humanities, as well as how humanistic and cultural study might contribute to addressing our planetary crisis.

Bio

John Levi Barnard is an Associate Professor of English at UIUC, specializing in American Literature and the Environmental Humanities. His recent work on the relation between US empire, global capitalism, and environmental crisis has appeared in *American Literature*, *American Quarterly*, *Post45*, *The Dial*, and elsewhere.

Panel 2: 11:00-12:30

Chair [Marc Doussard](#) (Urban and Regional Planning, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*)

[Valentina Orioli](#) (Urban Planning, *University of Bologna*, Municipality of Bologna)
“The EU 100 Cities Mission Seen from Bologna”

Abstract

Bologna is one of 9 Italian cities selected to be part of the European Union's 100 Cities Mission to achieve climate neutrality by 2030, ahead of the Green Deal goals.

Bologna's participation in the Mission has been prepared through significant urban, environmental and mobility planning and design work, and made possible thanks to the continuity of governance. One of the key actions on this path is the global transformation of urban mobility through a comprehensive approach (Bologna's 'New Mobility') that benefits from substantial resources from the National Recovery Plan.

The experience gained in Bologna provides a starting point for deepening research on the urban transformations taking place in Italy thanks to the Mission and the Recovery Plan, their limitations and the opportunities they represent. The design and implementation of Bologna's 'New Mobility' opens specific research perspectives on the relationship between urban design and mobility.

This is a neglected field for urban planning in Italy, but at the same time it is very promising towards the realization of environmental sustainability and social inclusion targets.

Bio

Architect and PhD, she is Associate professor of Urban Planning at the Department of Architecture of the University of Bologna.

In 2021-2024 she has been councillor at the Municipality of Bologna in charge of New mobility, infrastructures, public transport, 30 km/h City, protection of cultural heritage and historical gardens. In the previous administrative mandate 2016-21 she was councillor in charge of Urban Planning, Environment, Nomination of "I Portici di Bologna" to Unesco WHL and deputy mayor since 2020.

Her teaching and research activities are aimed at the knowledge and experimentation of tools for the design and governance of urban and regional transformations, in a perspective that focuses on physical space and its regeneration and draws on the comparison with the disciplinary tradition but also with urban history.

She is President of Urban@it, a National center for urban policy studies based at the University of Bologna and a member of the International Commission for the History of Towns (ICHT).

[Rebecca Walker](#) (Urban and Regional Planning, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) "Planning urban climate justice: risk, resilience, and repair"

Abstract

The landscapes in which we aim to advance climate justice are historically contingent, produced by and through on-going and intersecting processes of settler colonialism and racial capitalism. Our present-day geographies of climate risk reflect the legacies of racial exclusion, discriminatory zoning practices, and on-going urban development processes in which investments in resilience infrastructure threaten to raise costs and displace residents most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Drawing on reparative planning and Just Transitions frameworks, I consider how we plan more resilient in just cities in ways that repair legacies of past harms and advance more just futures.

Bio

Rebecca Walker is an Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. An interdisciplinary scholar, her research asks how unjust urban

environments were produced and are reproduced and how we might intervene in order to bring about more environmentally just urban futures. Her work focuses on the intersection of urban development, housing policy, and environmental planning. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota.

[McKenzie Johnson](#) (Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*) “The Politics of a Just Energy Transition in the United States: Technology, Infrastructure, and Society”

Abstract

The US has grappled increasingly with the question of how to execute a “just” energy transition. Rapid development of industrial-scale energy projects – from solar and wind farms to Carbon Capture and Storage projects – has generated substantial social conflict. In particular, diverse actors struggle with questions of 1) how to fairly distribute the costs and benefits of energy technology and infrastructure development across a diverse set of stakeholders; 2) how to achieve meaningful participation in decision-making processes; and 3) who, exactly, deserves to be considered a “subject of justice.” I engage with the complexity of pursuing a “just transition” by reviewing research conducted in my lab in the last five years on energy infrastructure contestation. Comparing conflict over different forms of energy infrastructure development in the Midwestern US, including oil and CO2 pipelines, wind turbines, soil carbon sequestration, and Carbon Capture and Storage, I argue that society needs to radically expand its definition of justice in the energy transition and conceptualize it in relative rather than absolute terms. Moreover, my research demonstrates that social conflict must be accepted as a critical component of a just transition as it enables diverse actors to renegotiate key issues over time and space.

Bio

Dr. Johnson’s research and teaching focuses on global environmental politics, environmental justice, and human security. She is particularly interested in understanding whether and how global environmental governance initiatives create local opportunities to enhance social justice and environmental sustainability. Her research program is global in scope: she has conducted interdisciplinary fieldwork in South Asia, Africa, and South America. However, her next major project will focus on the intersection of environmental justice and energy policy in the United States, with a specific focus on the ability of Environmental Impact Assessments to provide just outcomes for communities impacted by pipeline development.