



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Rebecca Shelton

Will defend her prospectus

The Meaning and Politics of a 'Just' Transition

Abstract

A sustainability transition - the process that unfolds to shift society towards a sustainable future - aims to simultaneously promote environmental protection, economy and livelihoods, and social equity. Yet often, a transition that is desired from an environmental perspective has negative social and economic impacts for others. In the context of the low-carbon energy transition, those that bear these impacts are fossil-fuel laborers and their communities. The notion of a “Just Transition” is intended to alleviate these concentrated, negative impacts through job creation and training programs. Since its inclusion in the Paris Agreement, transnational coalitions of organized labor, NGOs, philanthropists, and governments are now acting to financially and politically promote a just transition. The notion of a just transition has become a shared idea, or boundary concept, that unites diverse actors but there is actually little consensus among just transition narratives regarding *what* is just, to *whom* justice should be granted, and *how* to achieve it.

This dissertation will explore: a) the variation in the meaning of a just transition, to what that variation may be attributed, and how it is being used as a boundary concept, b) what a just transition means, why it is used, and the challenge of addressing all three pillars of sustainability simultaneously within an existing coalition and c) whether the goals and visions of just transition coalitions are or are not representative of the citizens in fossil-fuel production communities. This research will be conducted in a two-part approach: 1) a systematic review of the just transition literature and 2) a case study of Central Appalachia. Central Appalachia has faced greater decline in coal production and employment than any other region in the U.S. and local governments, NGOs, and philanthropists are organizing to promote a just transition.

Friday, May 3, 2019
9:30 a.m.
WGHL, Room 323

Faculty, students, and the public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:
Hallie Eakin (Chair)
Hanna Breetz
Dimitris Stevis