Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

MARK SHAKESPEAR

BA (University of Guelph, 2018)

“Renewed Power to the People? The Political Ecology of Canadian Energy Transitions”

Department of Sociology

Thursday, August 20, 2020
10:00 A.M.
Remote Defence

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. William Carroll, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Peyman Vahabzadeh, Department of Sociology, UVic (Member)
Dr. Martha McMahon, Department of Sociology, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Ana Maria Peredo, School of Environmental Studies, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Tim Hopper, School of Exercise Science, Physical and Health Education, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Amidst the rising tides of inequality and climate change, movements are developing which aim to unify social justice and environmental agendas. Proponents of energy democracy recognize that renewable energy transitions have the potential to foster more equitable social relations. However, literature indicates that renewable energy can also worsen social relations, and may fail to hinder, or could actively contribute to, ecological degradation. Therefore, research is needed that examines how the contexts in which renewables are implemented lead to divergent socio-ecological outcomes. This project compares strategies of renewable energy implementation in Canada, as embedded within socio-environmental projects ranging from fossil capitalism to eco-socialism. The framing of renewable energy, climate change, and socio-political issues in the strategies of actors within these projects are analyzed. Canadian governments, fossil fuel and renewable energy corporations were found to undertake renewables implementation within a clean growth framework, which maintains capitalist hegemony while responding to pressure to take action on climate change. Renewables are also used by governments and fossil capital firms to justify the continued growth of fossil fuel industries. The renewables industry is more ambitious in its transition strategy but does not contest fossil fuel production and exports. Renewable energy co-operatives offer a form of energy transitioning that challenges the undemocratic nature of corporate power but appears limited in its ability to influence multi-scalar change. Meanwhile, Leap, the Pact for a Green New Deal, and Iron and Earth exhibit an emergent push for just, democratic, and sustainable alternatives to fossil capitalism and clean growth. Energy democracy is central to Leap’s strategy, which suggests paths toward addressing the limitations of renewable energy co-operatives while supporting other forms of democratic renewable energy systems.