



# Community energy: negotiating energy democracy in practice

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The energy future in Scotland is one that is 'localised, democratised and mutualised'.

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CHRIS STARK, DIRECTOR OF ENERGY AND CLIMATE  
CHANGE, SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

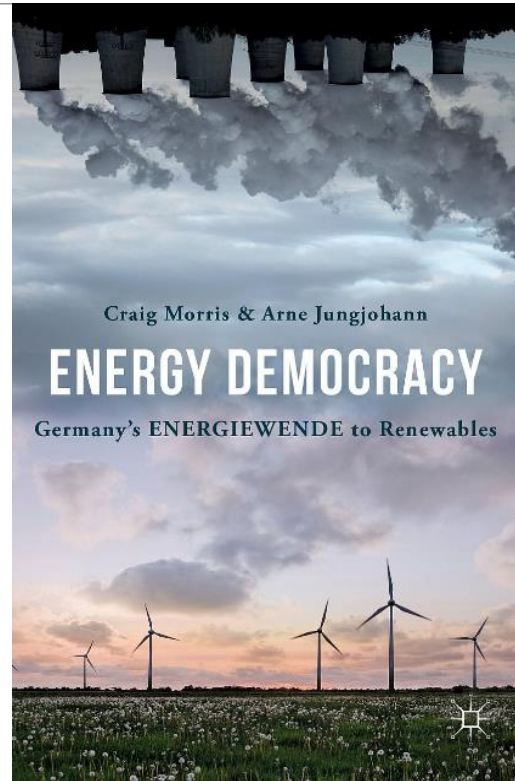
# Overview

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1. Background: energy democracy
2. The role for local & community ownership
3. Practicing energy democracy
4. Summary & further questions

# Background: from energy transition to energy democracy

- Growing 'energy democracy' movement
- Energy transitions an opportunity for social and economic transformation as well as technological



NEW YORK STATE  
**ENERGY  
DEMOCRACY**  
ALLIANCE

**Energy democracy  
in Europe**  
A survey and outlook



RENEWABLE  
DEMOCRATIC  
PARTICIPATION  
DEGROWTH  
SUFFICIENCY  
2014-2015

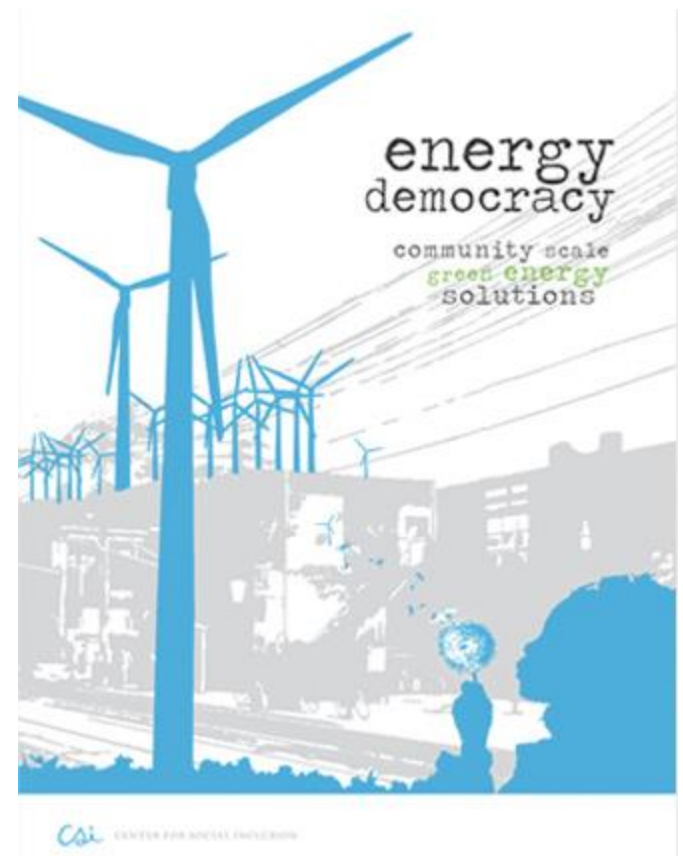


**TRADE UNIONS FOR  
ENERGY DEMOCRACY**

# Energy democracy

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- What is it? Key aspects include, greater:
  - Participation & inclusion
  - Decision-making influence
  - Accountability
- Why is this important?
  - Primarily a means to an end – democratic processes as a means of discovering and achieving more just outcomes
- How can this be achieved?



# The role of community

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- Assumption that localised, collective action is best placed to resolve competing claims of justice due to the **shared values** emerging from co-operation and open exchange
- ‘An asset that benefit the many, not the few’ - evident in a range of Scottish policy areas
  - Land Reform / Community Land Ownership
  - Community Empowerment Act
  - Regeneration Strategy
  - Community Energy

# Energy democracy in practice

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*'Every community has its differences. What is important, is how you deal with these.'*

(Board member of a Community Wind Development Group)

- Focus on processes rather than institutional structures
- Approx. 40 interviews with practitioners across Scotland

# Inclusion & engagement

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- Communities are shaping participation based on local priorities
  - Increasing focus on diversity
  - But, mostly only once projects are up and running
- Difficult to encourage active participation
- Blurry boundary personal/professional can both support and hamper engagement

*“If I had a family I couldn't have done this job. There is just no way, that you can give that level of commitment.”*

Community Development  
Officer



# Decision-making processes

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- Localised decision-making means individuals can have a stronger voice
- But (hidden) barriers might prevent some voices from being heard

*'At that time the group board was quite traditionalist. They had somebody there who was a senior person, it was quite difficult challenging him. And she [my friend] challenged it in a very simplistic way and she was just... with humour actually. And that wasn't well thought off.'*

Local energy group board member

# Accountability

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- Communities have structures in place to ensure decision-makers are accountable
- But, in practice processes for oversight not always followed, for a number of reasons
  - Pressures to achieve outcomes within (externally-defined) timescales
  - (Voluntary) board members have multiple pressures on their time
  - Increasing complexity of projects

*'Sometimes it's quicker and easier to just do it yourself[...] The more people you bring in with legal decision-making capacity... there is a very clear route to get this done. And... if anyone questions that, messes anything up, that could destabilise the whole thing. That's a risk I'm frankly not willing to take.'*

Community energy group founder

# Summary



- Community or local energy projects are a great opportunity for individuals and communities to have a greater say in energy decision-making
- Communities are shaping democratic governance according to local contexts and priorities
- But also struggle to negotiate differences of opinion and competing demands
- ‘Ideal’ democratic processes (inclusive, accountable) not always compatible with delivering timely outcomes
- Currently limited evidence how different ways of organising relate to (improved) outcomes

# Further questions

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- How important are processes behind community action versus their outcomes?
- Are communities ready and able to provide democratic functions that are expected of them? Or are we expecting too much?
- How to **support** communities who experience governance difficulties without **prescribing** specific solutions?
- So far focus has been on local generation – how important are greater local control over distribution and consumption of energy?
  - How to achieve this?