

Green Transition in Canada: Perspectives on the Way Forward Workshop

May 4-5, 2023

Laurier Centre for the Study of Canada
and
Balsillie School of International Affairs

Canada has reached an inflection point in its political, economic and social evolution as a nation – will its future be ‘green’ or ‘brown’? Since 2016, the Trudeau Liberal government has committed to ambitious climate and environmental targets, including a 40–42% reduction in greenhouse gases from 2005 levels by 2030; an economy that is “Net Zero” by 2050; and protection of 17% of its terrestrial and marine areas. Moreover, it has blazed new trails with a national system of carbon pricing, electric vehicle mandates and an emissions cap on the oil and gas industry. The Government has also committed to Reconciliation with Canada’s Indigenous Peoples, working nation-to-nation with communities which practice stewardship over their lands.

The proposed workshop event will synthesize the research findings of a project that peers behind these official commitments and high-profile policies, and asks whether Canadian governments are truly moving us towards a Green (sustainability) Transition. The project team will present their findings with regard to whether they see evidence of *transformational changes* in the “3 Ps”: (1) influence of **perspectives** and knowledge systems; (2) decision-making **processes**; and (3) **policies** that can effectively move Canada towards a low-carbon, sustainable and resilient future. At the workshop, findings from presenters will be assessed, compared and integrated across the 3 Ps, in order to identify cross-cutting insights with regard to the opportunities for, and obstacles to, transformative change as well as develop a set of policy recommendations. Both the individual research contributions and the cross-cutting insights will also result in an edited volume already under contract with Oxford University Press.

As the most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (April 2022) makes clear, the time to make the hard choices – with respect to how we will power our society and economy, what kinds of economic activities we will support, the way that we build our homes and infrastructures, and how we will support those who are in danger of being left behind by the changes we make – is now. Also clear is that relying on conventional sources of information, growth mindsets, closed decision systems and decades-old policy tools is not sufficient. We need to have at hand – and actually use - both science and other ways of knowing, including Indigenous Knowledge; we need to challenge the

assumptions that govern our policy approaches to date; we need to use the legal, policy and process levers that are available to fullest advantage to push the system in greener directions as well as create new ones; and we need to be open to true partnerships across nations, levels of government and communities in Canada.

We also need to be strategic in how we approach the many economic, political and social constraints that frame policy-making in Canada right now, perhaps the most difficult we have faced in a century. The COVID-19 public health emergency dealt escalating blows to the economy, the public sector and individuals, necessitating high levels of government intervention and support. This intervention has been controversial and contested, resulting in new opposition movements, visceral debate about citizen freedoms and re-alignments in partisan dynamics. Moreover, existing inequities have deepened considerably as a result of the pandemic, across sectors of the economy (Statistics Canada 2021), between urban and rural communities (Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation 2021), and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities (Palmateer 2020). Further, the COVID hit to public finances has been eye-popping; the Government of Canada's budget deficit went from around \$15 billion in the 2018-2019 budget to \$114 billion in 2020-21 (Government of Canada Budget 2022). And Canada faces these challenges as a "house divided"; provinces have adopted very different political and policy approaches to both the public health and climate crises, which has translated into considerable federal-provincial conflict (Macdonald 2020). Among the most concerning developments are the twinned, interlinked phenomena of a polarization of public debate in Canada, yet political disengagement on the part of average Canadians (Environics 2021).

Across the country there are researchers in universities, environmental groups, Indigenous and local communities, think tanks and the private sector monitoring developments at all levels of government and examining governance of the Green Transition, yet the knowledge base – and our understanding – of where we are with this critical task is fragmented and partial. The proposed workshop will bring together those with diverse knowledge and experience to share their research findings and undertake a collective "taking stock" of the current state of governing the Green Transition in Canada. Reflecting the complexity of the sustainability challenge in Canada, the research team is interdisciplinary and diverse; contributors are political scientists and public policy experts, as well as geographers, lawyers, business professors, economists, sociologists, biologists and international relations specialists, as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous experts. While investigating their own governance-related research areas for signs of transformational changes, presenters are employing a consistent framework of evaluation - informed by debates and discussions in the social sciences, as well as insights from Indigenous scholarship, ecology and earth systems governance, among others – to investigate the record of sustainability transition governance in Canada.

The workshop presenters will undertake the hard work of synthesizing and integrating individual research findings and will work together to develop the project's primary research products, including:

1) Key Message Briefs that will be prepared prior to the workshop, summarizing the findings for each contribution across the 3 Ps and helping to prepare presenters, practitioners, students and attendees to discuss cross-cutting themes; 2) a multi-authored Conclusion to the edited volume which will summarize findings across the 3 Ps (perspectives, processes and policies) in more detail; 3) based on this summary of findings, a multi-authored Policy Brief which sets out a series of recommendations for actions, that can accelerate us down the path of a sustainability transition (with dissemination materials for the media); and 4) a set of teaching tools based on summaries of workshop discussions on key questions and student-led interviews with presenters, to support faculty who want to integrate Green Transition materials into their curriculum. In doing so, this workshop represents a significant step towards piecing together scholarship on the Green Transition, and developing a strong network of connections among Green Transition scholars, students, practitioners and the NGO community.

Evaluative Framework for Governing the Green Transition

Early in the pandemic, advocates for a 'Green Stimulus' made their case that public monies used to pull the economy back onto its feet should be deliberately directed at low- or zero-carbon economic activities that would support a Green Transition – including renewable energy sources, transit and vehicle electrification, decarbonization of heavy industry and investment in new green technologies such as hydrogen energy (Pembina Institute 2020). Further, it was argued that investments should also be made with equity in mind, ensuring that those communities and regions most dependent on fossil fuels and carbon-intensive industries be supported through the profound economic, environmental and social transformations to come. Existing deep societal inequities would also need to be addressed through a more inclusive recovery, a 'Just Transition' (Klein 2022). In this project, we understand the Green Transition to include three key aspects: the shift to low carbon energy generation and economic activity; the focus on social development and equity in terms of providing support to marginalized and racialized communities as we transition to a greener economy; and the full commitment to establishing and maintaining respectful relations with Indigenous Peoples whose sovereignty, ways of knowing and approaches to land stewardship must inform in fundamental ways, and provide a basis for, our transition approaches.

Scholars studying sustainability transitions have adopted various analytical perspectives on how such fundamental shifts can occur. The analytical framework used here shares some assumptions and conceptual ground with "transition management", a body of scholarship which thinks about what governance approaches can best facilitate and accelerate sustainability transitions (Loorbach 2010; Kemp et al. 2007). The assumption here is that sustainability transitions can and must be managed, and that leadership is required. This is done by shifting the networks of actors (individuals, firms, and other organizations, collective actors) and institutions (societal and technical norms, regulations, standards of good practice), as well as material artifacts and knowledge" towards more sustainable systems.

But how can we measure the progress that we see, if any? There are three key components of a sustainability transition that the PI and presenters focus on (the 3 P's), as a way of organizing our analysis on the degree to which Canada is embarked on a sustainability transition:

Perspectives and Knowledge Systems:

Dominant perspectives embedded in our governance systems can frame and limit what we think of as possible, and direct our energies away from a focus on how to “live well with the Earth” (McGregor 2021). Instead, we need to gain “knowledge from a multitude of different cultural ... perspectives, each with its distinct way of knowing, can assist us in negotiating the atmosphere of uncertainty that characterizes our changing environment” (Kimmerer 2013). The sustainability perspective does help us to link social and economic well-being with environmental quality in a temporal relationship extending over generations but the ways in which it has been interpreted and acted upon by political actors in governing systems has often not lived up to its ideals (Johnston et al. 2007). Indigenous knowledge systems can help embed a responsibility-based ethos for environmental management which is rooted in intergenerational awareness and “a nonhierarchical view of the place of humans within a larger society (or Circle) of all beings on land” (Sioui 2020). This responsibility-based mindset, Sioui argues, “has the potential to enhance current mainstream (rights-based) environmental policy frameworks.”

Processes:

Critical to bringing about transitions are changes to the way in which governance and decision-making happen. Scholars emphasize in particular “a participatory process of visioning, learning and experimenting” (Loorbach 2010, Frantzeskaki et al. 2018). Kemp et al. (2007) argue that “[d]ifferent types of governance are needed: more open, adaptive, and oriented towards learning and experimenting.” The emphasis here is on interactive, iterative processes among actors at all levels that involve cycles of learning, which then spur action.

Policies:

Finally, presenters will examine the policies that have been developed/implemented in their areas and place them in place one of the three categories:

- *Progressive* policies, which not only provide higher levels of environmental protection ambition, prioritizing ecological systems, but are also aimed at addressing inequities and vulnerabilities of

marginalized groups/peoples. Further, Green Transition policies should be actively recognizing and applying Indigenous stewardship practices through the lens of rights and autonomy.

- *Greenwash*. These are policies which might appear green but actually do little to transform the underlying perspectives, the operation of our economic, social and governance systems or our policies.
- *Regressive* policies, which reduce environmental protection, are exclusionary and make no attempt to recognize Indigenous autonomy or stewardship over lands in question.

This three-component umbrella for the individual contributions will help to organize research results in such a way as to facilitate identification of cross-cutting themes across the research papers, while providing sufficient room for interdisciplinarity and conceptual diversity. *It is at the workshop where the hard work of synthesizing and integrating the individual findings will occur, particularly in terms of identifying the obstacles to and opportunities for supporting a sustainability transition, as well as approaches and tools that are working well and might be used elsewhere.*