

The Environmental Conflict over the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

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Abstract : The aim of this research is to analyze the origins, the development and possible outcomes of the environmental conflict between grassroots organizations, indigenous communities, Kinder Morgan Corporation, and the Canadian government over the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. Building on the political ecology and the environmental justice theoretical framework, this research examines the impacts and risks of tar sands extraction, production, and transportation on climate change, public health, the environment, and indigenous people's rights over their lands. This study is relevant to the environmental justice and political ecology literature because it discusses the unequal distribution of environmental costs and economic benefits of tar sands development; and focuses on the competing interests, needs, values, and claims of the actors involved in the conflict. Furthermore, it will shed light on the context, conditions, and processes that lead to the organization and mobilization of a grassroots movement- comprised of indigenous communities, citizens, scientists, and non-governmental organizations- that draw significant media attention by opposing the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion. Similarly, the research will explain the differences and dynamics within the grassroots movement. This research seeks to address the global context of the conflict by studying the links between the decline of conventional oil production, the rise of unconventional fossil fuels (e.g. tar sands), climate change, and the struggles of low-income, ethnic, and racial minorities over the territorial expansion of extractive industries. Data will be collected from legislative documents, policy and technical reports, scientific journals, newspapers articles, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with representatives and members of the grassroots organizations, indigenous communities, and Burnaby citizens that oppose the Trans Mountain pipeline. These interviews will focus on their perceptions of the risks of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion; the roots of the anti-tar sands movement; the differences and dynamics within the movement; and the strategies to defend the livelihoods of local communities and the environment against tar sands development. This research will contribute to the understanding of the underlying causes of the environmental conflict between the Canadian government, Kinder Morgan, and grassroots organizations over tar sands extraction, production, and transportation in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. Moreover, this work will elucidate the transformations of society-nature relationships brought by tar sands development. Research findings will provide scientific information about how the resistance movement in British Columbia can challenge the dominant narrative on tar sands, exert greater influence in environmental politics, and efficiently defend Indigenous people's rights to lands. Furthermore, this research will shed light into how grassroots movements can contribute towards the building of more inclusive and sustainable societies.

Keywords : environmental conflict, environmental justice, extractive industry, indigenous communities, political ecology, tar sands

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