

Toward an anti-fracking mobilization toolkit: ten practices from Western Newfoundland's campaign¹

Leah M. Fusco and Angela V. Carter

Abstract

This article documents the primary practices of the successful anti-fracking campaign that arose in 2012 in the western region of Newfoundland and Labrador, one of Canada's oil-dependent provinces. Drawing on qualitative research that included interviews with 34 mobilization participants in the region, it presents ten general practices that campaign leaders deemed particularly effective. Spanning three themes – building alliances, honing locally-relevant messages, and engaging the public and decision-makers – these practices provide useful information or inspiration to organizers resisting fracking in other rural communities facing similar constraints.

Keywords: hydraulic fracturing (fracking); Newfoundland and Labrador; rural communities; social movements; oil and gas development

1. Introduction

Anti-fracking campaigns began in the US in the late 1990s and have since spread to almost every country where hydraulic fracturing, or fracking,² has been applied (Carter and Eaton 2016; McGowan 2015). The first Global Frackdown day of action in 2012 signaled the international scope of the movement and by the 2015 event, more than 1,200 organizations from 64 countries participated in calling for fracking bans. The global rise of this community resistance is a prime example of Naomi Klein's "blockadia," a term

¹ We thank the individuals we interviewed during this research (names of interviewees are withheld in accordance with ethical approvals received for this study). We also thank Leigh McDougall for research assistant, Nadine Fladd, John Peters, *Interface* editor Irina Ceric, and two anonymous reviewers for revision advice. This research was funded by a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada Strategic Research Grant (#865-2008-0062). Authors are listed in reverse alphabetical order; both contributed equally.

² Fracking is an oil or gas extraction method that involves forcing large volumes of liquids into underground formations to release reserves that would otherwise be trapped in impermeable rock. Injections primarily include water with a range of chemicals (sometimes very toxic) and proppants to ensure fractures stay open. Produced water (injected liquids plus material from the underground formation) flows back to the surface. The practice of fracking has grown exponentially since the mid-2000s, particularly in the US since it was combined with horizontal drilling. It is associated with a wide range of negative human health and environmental impacts (Carter and Eaton 2016). Fracking was initially developed in the US and the American government and US firms have promoted the technology in North Africa, South America, Europe, India, and China as an energy security opportunity (McGowan 2015, p. 46).

capturing the multiplying instances of local mobilization against risky extractive industries, particularly fossil fuels. Klein describes this resistance as inherently rooted in specific places and led by average citizens “with an intense love of their homeplace and a determination to protect it” (p. 344). As blockadia expands, mirroring the spread of extraction, “Suddenly, no major new project, no matter how seemingly routine, is a done deal” (2014: 294-296).

This paper examines anti-fracking resistance that emerged in western Newfoundland, in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), Canada, in 2012.

Community opposition here was arguably unexpected given that the region is primarily comprised of economically struggling rural communities within a province deeply dependent on offshore oil development. Moreover, citizens in the region had limited social activism experience. At the time the opposition arose, we had been drafting a paper analyzing why NL had not experienced the contentious politics surrounding oil that were notable in other oil-rich areas across the country and world. We were intrigued by the opposition to fracking and began following the mobilization to understand its origins and potential policy impact. Over the course of four years, local people constructed a successful campaign that led to a provincial fracking review and a pause on fracking in the province for the foreseeable future.

In a recently published paper, we analyzed why, contrary to theoretical expectations, mobilization arose in western Newfoundland (Carter and Fusco 2017). We build from that work in this paper by examining the central practices of western Newfoundland’s effective mobilization. Our aim is to use this analysis to highlight mobilization practices that might be relevant to other rural communities facing unwanted fracking proposals. We recognize that every community will confront unique challenges and opportunities given its particular experiences, history, and socio-economic contexts. However, we also expect that in other economically depressed rural areas where fracking is often proposed (Boudet et al. 2016), there may be similarities in conditions and possibilities that make pertinent the mobilization lessons learned from this case.

In this study, we drew on socio-economic data on the region, corporate and government documents, and media coverage of the fracking debate in regional and provincial newspapers. Our analysis was informed by commentary on fracking regulation drawn from scholarly and grey literature globally, primarily relating to Canadian and American cases (as summarized in Carter and Eaton 2016). Most importantly, in 2016 we conducted 34 interviews with key actors involved in the NL anti-fracking campaign. Interviewees included people from a variety of groups and actor types, including NGOs, municipal government officials, independent experts, non-oil industry representatives, university student organizers, Indigenous community representatives, labour representatives, and faith group representatives. This research was also

informed by fieldwork, participant observation, and substantial time spent on site.³

This paper proceeds in three parts. First, we provide a background on the province of NL and the western Newfoundland region, outlining the context in which mobilization took place and the primary organizers, structure, message framing, and strategy of the campaign. Next, we reflect on recent social movement literature which provides a framework for our investigation and discussion. We then present what we consider the key practices that contributed to the success of the anti-fracking campaign and provide examples of their application. We conclude with a discussion of whether or how this isolated struggle might contribute to a broader blockadia of fossil fuel extraction arising in response to the climate crisis.

2. Context

2.1. Newfoundland and Labrador as petro-province

Since sustained European contact began in the 1500s, NL has been a decidedly resource-extraction, export-based economy (Cadigan 2009). For most of its settler history, the province was economically, socially, culturally, and geographically organized around the fishery. However, new resources were later exploited in an attempt to diversify the economy, including forestry and mining in the 1800s, hydroelectricity in the 1960s, and oil in the 1990s. After North Atlantic cod fish stocks collapsed due to overfishing, the federal government implemented the cod fishery moratorium in 1992, inciting massive socio-economic turmoil in the province.

Although oil was first discovered offshore NL in 1979, the industry did not rise to prominence until the 1990s, just as the province was reeling from the cod fishery loss. First production began at the Hibernia field in 1997 and since then, particularly over the last decade, the province has become unequivocally economically reliant on oil.⁴ The industry has driven unprecedented economic growth, representing as much as 34% of the government's total revenues in 2011.⁵ However, since oil production peaked in 2007, the provincial government has actively encouraged exploration offshore and onshore to ensure the

³ Fusco made three field site visits to western Newfoundland over the 2012-2015 period and also observed activism unfold in St. John's. Carter lived in the western Newfoundland region from 2009-2012 and participated in community events and research (Bourgault, Cyr, Dumont and Carter 2014) on oil development off the coast of western Newfoundland. We also participated in or observed key moments of the debate: Fusco attended public consultations held by the Newfoundland and Labrador Hydraulic Fracturing Review Panel, observed meetings between the panel and relevant groups in the region, and reviewed the panel's final report; Carter and Fusco submitted comments to the panel during the review process.

⁴ For more detailed history of offshore oil development in NL, see House 1985.

⁵ Based on the Government of NL's annual "Report on the Program Expenditures and Revenues of the Consolidated Revenue Fund" reports' data on offshore royalties, contributions to the offshore revenue fund, and corporate income taxes.

continued flow of oil revenue. As a result of the rapid global decline in oil prices in 2014, the province has returned to economic crisis, with soaring government deficits and staggering rates of unemployment again the norm. This economic stress has only intensified the government's enthusiasm for expanding the oil sector.

Despite rising global awareness of the environmental costs of oil extraction, the province's experience with the cod fishery collapse, and the recent economic volatility due to oil dependence, there has been little public opposition to or critique of the offshore oil industry or the government's reliance on it. The oil as economic saviour narrative has remained strong. While scientists have periodically raised concerns about the province's lacklustre environmental regulatory response (Fraser and Ellis 2008, 2009; Wiese and Ryan 2003), these critiques did not incite broader public mobilization in the province against oil extraction (Fusco 2008)—that is, not until the anti-fracking mobilization in western Newfoundland.

2.2. Fracking and resistance in western Newfoundland

Western Newfoundland is a rural region of the island of Newfoundland. Corner Brook is the most populous city (with approximately 32,000 people), but most communities are much smaller: Stephenville has fewer than 7,000 people and Rocky Harbour fewer than 1,000. These communities are spread out across a geographically large region, some with subpar access to the internet and comparatively low literacy and education rates (Carter and Fusco 2017). The availability of even basic public services is also sometimes limited. In particular, access to drinking water has been an ongoing issue as evidenced by the regular boil water advisories in the region and the frequency with which some towns have to shut off water in the summer months to maintain adequate pressure.



Figure 1: Map of Western Newfoundland Region

Source: ArcGIS Online

Western Newfoundland also faces longstanding economic precarity. While significant in the eastern part of the island, oil boom benefits have not been evenly distributed across the province (Cadigan 2014; Peters, Cadigan, and Carter 2014). Economic uncertainty remains rampant in this region and is reflected in socio-economic data demonstrating dramatically low income rates, high unemployment, and/or people receiving income support in many local communities (Carter and Fusco 2017). Anti-fracking organizers interviewed echoed this by speaking about the economic “desperation” and the need for “economic relief” in the region, noting the great “fear of the future” due to economic instability.

Amidst this economic uncertainty, two sectors offer hope for stability. Gros Morne National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is an important tourist draw for western Newfoundland and one of the economic foundations of the region (CPAWS 2012, 18; Brake and Addo 2014, 28; Tourism Synergy Ltd. and Broad Reach Strategies 2016, ii). Tourists are attracted to its ecological beauty and solitude. As one local tourism sector business person explained, “Gros Morne and this location here, we brand ourselves [...] using the word magic.

People come to Gros Morne and they find a certain magic.” At the same time, the fisheries continue to be an economic mainstay of the region (Fisheries and Oceans Canada 2011, 64). The value of the commercial fisheries (excluding subsistence or recreational fishery), was estimated at over \$19 million over the 2000–2007 period for the Bay St. George - Port au Port and Bay of Islands regions (Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2011, p. 64).

It was within this context that in November of 2012, Shoal Point Energy, a small independent Canadian petroleum exploration and development company, held public meetings in three communities in western Newfoundland and stated its intention to frack. This was the first time many citizens in the region had heard of Shoal Point’s proposal. In response, citizens in the Port au Port and Gros Morne areas began discussing fracking informally around kitchen tables. Most people initially involved in these conversations did not have substantial or recent social activism experience, yet all were highly motivated to stop fracking for a variety of reasons.⁶

Early leaders formed two organizations to address fracking, the Port au Port / Bay St George Fracking Awareness Group (hereafter referred to as the PauP group) and the Gros Morne Coastal Alliance, both of which became central to the anti-fracking mobilization. These groups took a lead position in the campaign and played key roles in crafting messaging, communicating with the public, and growing the mobilization. Leaders connected with existing social and environmental organizations in western Newfoundland, such as the Western Environment Centre in Corner Brook, as well as groups and individuals across the island in St. John’s (the capital of the province), such as the NL Federation of Labour and faith groups. Interviewees also noted the close integration of settler and Indigenous groups in western Newfoundland throughout the campaign, with one spiritual leader of the local Mi’kmaq First Nation Band stating that “there’s really no separation” between settler and Indigenous groups in the resistance to fracking, “we work together.” Coordination across these organizations was provided by the Newfoundland and Labrador Fracking Awareness Network (NL-FAN), an umbrella organization created by campaign leaders in June 2013. As the provincial network was growing, local organizers were connecting with anti-fracking groups across Canada and internationally. All of these connections were fundamental to the campaign but it remained led from the grassroots, by the people and communities surrounding the potential fracking sites.

Local organizers focused on communicating consistently with the public and decision makers about fracking, using carefully considered messages of local relevance (primarily the threat to fresh water, rural quality of life, and sustainable economic sectors). Groups conveyed these messages using a variety of media as well as by organizing events to foster broader public engagement with the campaign. One interviewee explained that campaign organizers aimed

⁶ We discuss the origins of this motivation in more detail in Carter and Fusco 2017.

to maintain a constant flow of information about fracking, to the point that it would be “in the media so much you couldn’t help but listen.”

In response to pressure from local groups, in August of 2014 the provincial government announced it would establish an external independent panel, the Newfoundland and Labrador Hydraulic Fracturing Review Panel, to examine the process of fracking and conduct public consultations. The panel’s recommendations would inform government’s general policy on fracking approvals and its decision on the existing proposal for western Newfoundland. While some participants of the anti-fracking campaign contested key aspects of the panel and considered withholding their participation, organizers chose to engage with the process to ensure that panel members heard the full intensity of local dissent.

The review panel released its final report and recommendations in May 2016 and many mobilization leaders considered it a victory. Although the panel did not explicitly advise a fracking ban, it did recommend that the government meet a number of very time and resource-intensive criteria, such as a health impact assessment, prior to accepting new fracking proposals. The report particularly stressed the importance of the provincial government obtaining communities’ social license before approving a fracking project. This implies that the government would not grant approval to frack anywhere in the province without community consent. Although neither the government nor the report indicated how this social license would be obtained, it is highly unlikely to be granted in the western Newfoundland region (the only area considered for fracking to date) given the strength of the local mobilization against fracking.

Fracking in NL is unlikely in the foreseeable future, no doubt due to the organizing efforts of anti-fracking groups in western Newfoundland over the 2012-2016 period. Below we discuss some of the specific practices that contributed to the campaign’s success. First, however, we situate our work within the broader literature on social movements and more specifically on anti-fracking mobilization.

3. Theorizing the rise of anti-fracking mobilization

This case both challenges and conforms to two central expectations in recent scholarly work on collective mobilization against energy projects and fracking in particular. The literature would have us expect little or no collective mobilization against fracking given the desperate need for economic activity and lack of experience with collective organizing in western Newfoundland. Notably, McAdam and Boudet (2012) identify causal conditions for mobilization and non-mobilization against proposed energy projects that, as we have argued in detail elsewhere (Carter and Fusco 2017), would have us expect no collective action against fracking in this case. Similarly, Eaton and Kinchy (2016) accounted for the lack of collective mobilization against fracking in Saskatchewan and Pennsylvania by referring to local citizens’ “ambivalent perceptions of the oil and gas industry.” In those cases, community members in

depressed rural regions were torn between the industry's economic benefits and the negative health, environmental, and social impacts. At the same time, they lacked political opportunities and organizational capacity to support a resistance campaign. The well-organized anti-fracking mobilization campaign in western Newfoundland defies these expectations.

Seeking to understand the rise and effectiveness of this anti-fracking campaign, we draw on three streams of the broader social movement literature. The first, resource mobilization literature, highlights the central importance of groups gathering resources (such as money, people, time, and access to media) and applying them via some form of mobilizing structure. This structure can be a formal organization, for instance, a well-established environmental organization. Importantly for our case, however, they can also be informal, drawing on networks of trust and credibility built among family and friends or through work or volunteer activities (McCarthy 1996). Second, we draw on work on political opportunities, which underscores the importance of the wider political and institutional environment for social mobilization (Tarrow 1994; McAdam 1982; Meyer 2004).⁷ Changes in this environment alter the political opportunities available to groups and, as Tarrow states, act as "signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements" (1994:54). For instance, the election of an ally to public office might improve a group's chances of achieving a desired policy change and encourage the group to apply additional resources to forward its goal. The political opportunities literature also suggests that groups can be effective by seizing opportunities even if they do not have extensive internal resources (McAdam 1982). Through activities such as protests, groups can alter the normal functioning of society and gain support for their cause. Clearly, this is an essential factor to consider in rural communities with few resources and little experience with environmental activism. Finally, we consider social movement literature on framing. Here the emphasis is on the role of culture and subjectivity in the rise of social movement activity (Goodwin and Jasper 1999; McAdam and Boudet 2012; Zirakzadeh 2006). How an issue is framed—how it is packaged and presented—can effectively shape public perceptions, gain supporters, and accomplish movement goals. The efficacy of this framing is, according to McAdam, "determined, in part, by the *cultural resonance* of the frames advanced by organizers" (1994:38). In other words, frames have to be sensitive to place and require an understanding of the people and communities involved and their shared experiences over time.

Social movement literature on framing clearly reflects findings in recent research on anti-fracking mobilizations and the case of western NL confirms a central expectation in this work. New research, such as Davis and Hoffer (2012), Willow (2016), and Wright (2013), emphasizes the importance of framing fracking as a multifaceted threat to the economy, health, and the environment as a way to oppose industry's neoliberal framing of fracking as an activity that

⁷ What counts as a political opportunity has been subject to debate and the term has developed over time. For more on this, see Meyer and Minkoff (2004).

provides jobs and revenue. Bomberg (2017) further notes how effective framing interprets fracking as a threat to local democracy and sovereignty (that is, the ability of local people to choose their own future) while challenging the trustworthiness of fracking proponents. This literature also finds that focusing on matters of local interest is essential to effective framing. Hopke, for example, attributes the success of community anti-fracking campaigns in Sweden to groups “contextualiz[ing] their activism in terms of local history, with a strong sense of connection to place and concern for local environments” (2016, p. 388; see also Boudet et al. 2016 and Wright 2013). Moreover, this locally-rooted understanding is collaboratively built through the “deliberative conversations among community members” so essential to “informed political participation” (Arnold and Holahan 2014, p. 349).

Despite the contribution that frame analysis has made toward incorporating culture into our understanding of social movements, some scholars still lament the continued focus on structure (for example as discussed in McAdam and Boudet 2012). We agree with research that highlights the relationship between the cultural and structural elements of social movement emergence (McAdam and Boudet 2012; Meyer et al. 2002). We understand the success of western Newfoundland’s campaign as a result of strategic framing, the effective use of resources, and the political opportunities available to local groups. Citizens in the region were motivated to seize political opportunities and apply resources because they perceived a risk from fracking. These perceptions of risk were based on shared experiences informed by the socio-economic, cultural, political, and historic context. It was these shared experiences that helped organizers shape culturally resonant frames to gain public support for anti-fracking mobilization.

4. Toward a community mobilization toolkit

In this section, we present ten practices deemed by mobilization leaders as particularly effective in the western Newfoundland anti-fracking campaign. These are organized into three general categories: a) building broad alliances, b) honing locally-relevant messages, and c) engaging the public and decision-makers. As we discuss, these practices reflect findings in recent fracking contention literature, specifically the importance of framing, but also the broader social movement work on resource mobilization and political opportunities.

A: Building alliances

Anti-fracking campaign leaders in western Newfoundland focused on building diverse and wide-reaching alliances. This network provided a structure through which resources could be organized, developed, and strategically applied. Organizers used two main alliance-building practices.

Mobilization practice #1: Build a network from the ground up

Following Shoal Point Energy's public meetings about their plans to frack, citizens concerned about fracking in western Newfoundland organized into two main local groups, the Port au Port / Bay St. George Fracking Awareness Group and the Gros Morne Coastal Alliance. As discussed above, these two organizations built relationships with groups outside the region, province, and country, receiving information, research, and advice about effective strategizing and campaigning. These ties also provided moral support by making local organizers feel less isolated in their campaign. Notably, leaders in western Newfoundland connected with activists in St. John's to spark the creation of the east coast fracking awareness group. They also built a relationship with the Council of Canadians (CoC), a lead NGO that works on fracking nationally and has a regional office in Halifax and a chapter in St. John's. The CoC provided outreach materials, such as buttons and posters, from their national anti-fracking campaign. More importantly, however, CofC provided information on its recent experience navigating Nova Scotia's fracking review process, which gave NL organizers examples of strategies and tactics that could be useful during the NL panel review.

Western Newfoundland grassroots leaders expanded their network across Canada, drawing on groups like the Sierra Club and Ecojustice, as well as on key individuals fighting fracking in their own communities. They established an important relationship with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), a longstanding charity focused on protecting public lands and waters, and collaborated with them to create the national Save Gros Morne National Park campaign. Local organizers also made international connections in Europe and the US, initially by Facebook and then through telephone and video calls. As one interviewee remarked, "I went all over by phone and I was bringing that to the table, to the network. [...] I was bringing information from all over." The Sisters of Mercy (a group of religious women active in NL social and environmental justice issues), worked with their international counterparts to send an urgent letter of appeal to the UN as well as to representatives in the Canadian and NL governments. Meanwhile, other mobilization organizers on the west coast of Newfoundland joined CPAWS in writing to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the organization responsible for global World Heritage Sites. They warned about the proposal to frack just outside Gros Morne National Park, the only natural world heritage site in the province. UNESCO's World Heritage Committee later called on the Canadian government to establish a buffer zone around the park.

While external alliance building provided essential information and resources, the mobilization remained locally rooted and led. Because of their dense ties in the region, local organizers were the best judges of what messaging and strategies would be most effective and external groups respected this and committed to "amplifying" the voices and concerns of west coast communities.

Mobilization practice #2: Unify diverse allies

The primary anti-fracking grassroots organizations in the western newfoundland region unified the movement by creating NL-FAN. The network had an open-arms approach: as one NL-FAN initiator explained, “We welcome every single group into our network.” It was strategically established to raise awareness about fracking rather than overtly or vocally oppose it. This allowed collaboration toward a shared goal among organizations with different preferred policy outcomes and different approaches to political engagement.

At its peak, the network involved nearly two hundred individual members and seventeen groups, including environmental NGOs, a landowner association, local businesses, a 50 plus club, and religious organizations. This was highly effective as the range and diversity of NL-FAN membership conveyed to the public and government that fracking was a widespread concern and far from a fringe environmental issue. Through NL-FAN, groups came to a consensus to ask government for a pause on fracking until an independent review was completed. The strength of this unified voice undoubtedly contributed to the government implementing a hold on fracking permits and establishing the review panel.

Local Indigenous leadership and involvement were also a central part of this anti-fracking mobilization. For instance, Indigenous leaders organized water ceremonies, which powerfully communicated communities’ dependence on the lands and waterways threatened by fracking and emphasized the Mi’kmaq people’s commitment to protecting them. One ceremony was held in Stephenville in the fall of 2015 in coordination with others across the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Local Indigenous leaders also connected the western Newfoundland campaign to resistance efforts in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Thanks to this connection, Indigenous leaders who had participated in the landmark Elsipogtog First Nations’ blockade against seismic trucks in New Brunswick 2013 (Howe 2015) visited western Newfoundland in 2015 to bolster the local resistance effort.

B. Crafting the message

In the early days of the anti-fracking campaign, both lead organizations researched fracking and built networks with external groups. They then focused on strategically framing what they learned. With the aim of raising widespread awareness and concern that could be communicated to government decision makers, organizers aimed to create messages that would be meaningful in the daily lives of people in the communities while understating more divisive messages.

Mobilization practice #3: Hone messages that hit home

Mobilization leaders crafted their messaging to resonate with the particular local context and the values and shared experiences of the region. Organizers

stated that the most persuasive message was that fracking might exacerbate already precarious access to water. One interviewee explained that older residents in the region vividly remember the physical labour of gathering water from wells with buckets and bringing it home by horse. This person emphasized that “For the people here, the water was everything. And when you have a situation coming up where that is possibly going to be put in jeopardy, nobody, *nobody*, wants to go back to 1930s or 1940s Newfoundland.” Moreover, organizers noted that citizens are also keenly aware that home values would be impacted by deteriorated access to water. As another interviewee explained, “If you don’t have water to drink, you have no property value,” and so “what people had taken a lifetime to build up in terms of property value [...] with plans to hand on to children and grandchildren, that would be gone.” Water-related issues motivated disparate groups to participate in the mobilization and stirred first-time activists to join in.

Mobilization leaders also stressed risks posed by fracking to the rural quality of life and landscape of the region. The most tangible impact stressed here was the dramatic increase in truck traffic that fracking would necessitate and the associated noise and potential for spills and accidents. Traffic concerns were particularly relevant given that in some communities, for instance in the Port au Port area where there is only one road to the proposed development site, increased truck traffic would cut through the centre of quiet communities and accidents could potentially leave people stranded.

Fracking was also effectively cast as a threat to the region’s economic base. Local people formed the Port au Port Fishery Committee and focused public attention on the risk of oil spills to fisheries and inadequate government regulation. In provincial and national media, they showed abandoned conventional oil wells that had been leaking hydrocarbons into the ocean for years at Shoal Point with no government response. As one committee member noted, the existing leaking wells represented “the heart of the hydraulic fracking issue: how much faith can you have in a regulatory system that can’t even deal with abandoned wells?” Another explained that “It doesn’t take much to upset the balance in the bay. We would lose our lobster, herring, and shellfish. So it is a very sensitive bay and if the oil industry came in it would be the end of the day for fishing and tourism.” Likewise, organizers framed fracking as sullyng the allure of the national park. One interviewee recalled envisioning the future of the region as an industrial landscape based on the proponent’s description of its development plans. This kind of future would threaten the park, according to a campaign participant in the tourism sector. The “rumble of trucks up and down through the hills would pretty much put us out of business” and disrupt the quiet “magic” that attracts visitors.

Tapping into local people’s desires to bring their children home from Alberta, industry predominantly framed fracking as a way to provide employment and economic growth in the region. Black Spruce Exploration Corp. summarized fracking as an “immense opportunity” that “the people of western Newfoundland deserve” (2013: 2). However, mobilization leaders publicly

disputed this argument by presenting research on the limited number of jobs that fracking would provide for local people and how these jobs would actually *threaten* employment in tourism and fisheries, the region's sustainable industries.

Mobilization practice #4: Mute messages that divide

While emphasizing locally relevant risks, organizers strategically avoided framing fracking in ways that would be less relevant to, or highly controversial in, western Newfoundland. Perhaps most strikingly, they did not link their opposition to fracking with concerns about oil development in general. They recognized that they would gain little support in NL by speaking out against oil, given how dependent the province is on the offshore oil industry and how reliant citizens in the western region are on jobs in Alberta's tar sands. Instead, organizers stressed how fracking was a new technology with unique risks.

Similarly, organizers chose to bypass emphasizing the impact of fracking on climate change. Although many organizers were concerned about this issue, most interviewees felt it would not resonate locally and foster public opposition to the immediate issue of fracking. Climate change was deemed far less tangible and therefore less persuasive. As one interviewee noted, climate change is "important but abstract" for people in the region.

Also of note was the care organizers took in asserting their position on fracking: through NL-FAN, groups demanded a pause rather than a moratorium on fracking approvals to allow time for an external review and public consultations. While communities across the world have campaigned for moratoria on fracking, organizers in western Newfoundland avoided that specific word as they feared it would call to mind the federal government's 1992 cod fishery moratorium, one of the darkest hours in the province's history.

C. Spreading the word

Organizers conveyed anti-fracking messages using a variety of actions to raise public awareness, capture the attention of government decision-makers, and build support for their goal of preventing fracking in western Newfoundland. Some of these approaches were conventional, what we would expect to find in almost any community mobilization. However, others were very locally rooted and inspired, drawing on specific social and cultural ties within the communities. This section discusses how local organizations drew on existing resources and took advantage of political opportunities to build public interest and influence policymakers.

Mobilization practice #5: Communicate consistently in old and new ways

Organizers used both traditional and digital media to convey their opposition to fracking. They sought to build productive relationships with specific radio, print, and television reporters, sharing information frequently and making themselves available for comment under tight deadlines. Reporters responded with ongoing coverage of fracking issues and events that often featured commentary by campaign leaders. Meanwhile, anti-fracking group members submitted a steady stream of letters to the editor in local and provincial newspapers. They also participated regularly in radio call-in shows (a key political tradition in the province), both as invited guests and as public callers responding to the programming. Radio is particularly significant in these rural communities as it provides a way to share information locally and reach people who might have limited access to computers and the internet or lack literacy skills.

Using signs was another traditional means of communication that helped maintain public interest in the fracking debate. One member of the PauP group purchased \$3,000 worth of anti-fracking signs and sold them at public events. They became an important visual aid for the mobilization. When review panel members visited the region, organizers lined the roads with signs from the airport into the communities where the panel was travelling. Displaying signs also allowed people who were not comfortable speaking during public meetings or events to convey their position.

Organizers frequently commented on how significant the internet was to their campaign. Not only did using email, Facebook, blogging, and other social media allow them to communicate easily with each other and tap into valuable international networks, but connecting to other campaigns served as a wellspring of inspiration and support that kept organizers in small communities from feeling disconnected and isolated. Communicating on social media to groups contesting fracking in other areas made mobilization leaders feel that, in the words of one organizer, “we just had this huge massive world connection” and that there was “a real camaraderie.”

Mobilization practice #6: Play electoral politics

Over the 2012 to 2016 period, organizers stayed in direct contact with politicians who would be involved in future fracking decisions. They frequently contacted both elected officials and high-ranking civil servants to request information about the regulatory process and to express their concerns about fracking through formal letters, in-person meetings, or via less conventional communications. For example, the PauP group sent Christmas cards to every member of the provincial legislature in 2014, urging them to “Keep NL Frack-Free” (figure 2).



Figure 2: Port au Port/Bay St. George Fracking Awareness Group Christmas card to Members of the NL House of Assembly

Source: Port au Port/Bay St. George Fracking Awareness Group Facebook post, December 15, 2014, reproduced with permission of the organization.

Perhaps most importantly, organizers seized on the fall 2015 provincial election to lobby candidates and ensure they remain accountable. The PauP group formally requested that all candidates declare their position on fracking in writing. These positions were then publicized to inform voters' choices. In the summer of 2015, Liberal Party leader Dwight Ball maintained that if he were elected, no fracking would take place without social license. When he was elected as premier with a majority government in November 2015, anti-fracking organizers were quick to remind him of this commitment.

Mobilization practice #7: Keep it personal

Participants of the anti-fracking campaign drew on their dense interpersonal relationships developed over decades in close knit communities to build public concern about fracking. Person to person interactions were a major conduit for sharing information about the risks of fracking and for heightening the personal commitment of local people to attend events and join the campaign.

Interviewees commented on how they regularly engaged in conversations about fracking with people in a variety of work and social settings. One organizer

recalled bringing up the fracking issue “wherever I meet people. I have conversations in the middle of the ski trail.” Others would go purposefully to popular places in the community, such as the local coffee shops, barber shops, and garages, to share information about fracking informally with people who might otherwise not engage with the issue. Word would then spread from these locations into homes and other social settings across the region. These one-on-one relationships were also used to inform or remind people about public meetings, events, or opportunities to make submissions to the fracking review panel. Organizers recall setting up in the local grocery store parking lot on a busy Saturday morning to meet community members and invite them, often by name, to an upcoming public event on fracking. Organizers focused their on-the-ground communication efforts to best make use of local knowledge and connections. These conversations with community members sometimes involved debates about the merits of fracking, particularly the potential of the industry to bring young people back home and provide local economic development. However, organizers persisted in conveying the risks of the industry which, they argued, outweighed its uncertain benefits.

Mobilization practice #8: Lead the conversation and show risks in the flesh

Organizers brought the anti-fracking message to new audiences by giving presentations and facilitating small group discussions, initially across the region and later across the province. For example, one member of the PauP group gave approximately forty presentations to various groups and organizations to provide information and open a space to start community-based discussions about fracking. After each event, a volunteer gathered attendees’ contact information to grow the campaign’s email list and provide reminders about upcoming opportunities to participate. These presentations were done with a variety of groups, including labour organizations, ski clubs, chambers of commerce, Indigenous communities, elementary school classes, ministers of the provincial government, and church groups.

Campaign organizers also sought to lead the public conversation about fracking by organizing community events independent of more institutional bodies (such as university and government-sponsored events or consultations). These public events became important moments in the fracking debate in the region. For example, in April 2013, organizers invited government officials, as well as a knowledgeable member of an environmental NGO from Québec, to a public forum in Port au Port East to speak about fracking and respond to questions from the public. This meeting marked a turning point in the public conversation about fracking. While the NGO representative conveyed substantial knowledge about the risks of fracking based on experience working in other locations, the government officials offered only general assurances about fracking’s safety and were unable to answer basic questions about how they would ensure this safety. The meeting thus helped solidify community opposition to fracking in the region.

Organizers brought concerns about fracking onto the streets of their community through a “walk the block” march organized by the PauP group (inspired by a similar action by anti-fracking groups in New Brunswick). The event involved hundreds of local people who gathered with anti-fracking signs and banners and walked the streets of Stephenville to music and drumming. The walk was an impressive visual show of the strength of local opposition to fracking and garnered widespread media coverage. It also heightened the commitment of participants to the anti-fracking position. As one local leader explained, “I felt strongly that we had sort of activated a number of people at the Port au Port forum and in order to keep those people interested, to keep the fracking on the radar, we felt that we needed to get them out there” on the streets of one of the potentially impacted communities.

Another turning point in this local mobilization was when organizers brought in Jessica Ernst, an Albertan and an international icon in the struggle against fracking. Ernst travelled the west coast of Newfoundland and talked with small groups in community meetings, then gave a public lecture to another impressive crowd of approximately four hundred people who came from across the region to hear her speak. Hearing Ernst’s personal account of living amidst fracking and struggling to protect her land and family was a powerful forewarning that resonated intimately with local people. Interviewees repeatedly stressed how Ernst’s talk was a “huge turning point,” in the words of one organizer, and an important “consciousness raising” milestone in the debate, according to another.

Mobilization practice #9: Intervene in conventional processes

As public concern about fracking grew, formal institutions, such as the Government of NL and Memorial University, responded by hosting public events on the issue. Rather than boycott events that seemed to endorse fracking, or contest them from the outside, organizers used them as opportunities to assert the anti-fracking perspective. Organizers carefully prepared to participate “proactively, boldly, intentionally” and spread the word through their networks to ensure a strong turnout of concerned citizens. At events, organizers ensured challenging questions were asked, questions that that would reveal gaps in knowledge about the impact of fracking or the self-interested motives of experts, industry, and government representatives.

By far the most significant formal event that members of the anti-fracking campaign participated in was the series of consultations accompanying the fracking review panel in the fall of 2015. The stakes were tremendously high because the panel’s recommendations would inform government policy on fracking approvals. Yet many mobilization leaders and members of the public considered the panel problematic, even illegitimate, given its composition (the panel was composed of all white male academics mostly with engineering expertise and had no representation from social scientists, the western NL

region, or Indigenous communities). However, campaign members chose to participate vigorously rather than boycott. As one interviewee explained,

My number one reaction would be, this panel is illegitimate. I don't think anyone should participate in it and we should boycott it. But then I realized, look, they're going to do this, it's going to happen, it's going to be part of this process. So what is the most strategic thing to do here in terms of getting people on the west coast and on the east coast and everywhere plugged into it?

Mobilization leaders aimed to “flood” the panel, as one interviewee noted, with public concerns about fracking from the region and from across the province. Groups organized “submission parties” where people could gather to find support in making a submission to the panel. Organizers aimed to inspire contributions by posting easily accessible and shareable audio-visual examples on a Facebook site and a blog.

These efforts contributed to the remarkable number of submissions made by individuals and community groups to the review panel, 488 and 38, respectively. The vast majority (95% of the individual submissions and 87% of the community organization submissions) opposed fracking and called for a ban on the practice (NLHFRP 2016: 80-82). Organizers met their goal of spurring a considerable number of anti-fracking messages that could not be easily ignored by the panel.

Mobilization practice #10: Challenge conventional processes

Although organizers chose to participate in formal government-driven processes, they simultaneously challenged the boundaries of these processes, calling for them to be more inclusive and responsive to the concerns of the people in the region. For example, campaign organizers participated in the panel consultations while also working to “change the rules of the game” and “rehabilitate” a process that seemed designed to “make people feel alienated [...] and therefore not participate.” When the provincial government initially established the panel, the appointed panel members interpreted their mandate narrowly as examining only the direct process of fracking at the well site. However, organizers pressured the panel to consider the impact of fracking across the entire development process, from early exploration to final consumption. Similarly, the panel expanded its scope to include the broader social and economic impacts of fracking, such as the impact of noise on the tourism sector. Furthermore, anti-fracking groups insisted on a much broader geographic scope of consultations, which led the panel to add two more sessions in the areas that would most likely be impacted by fracking.

Especially notable was the effort organizers put into pressing the panel to accept unconventional submissions as a way to incite broader public participation. The panel initially sought comments in written form via email, regular mail, or an

online form. While organizers had become accustomed to writing letters to newspapers and public officials, they recognized that allowing only written interventions would limit general public participation. In the words of one organizer, it was highly “undemocratic,” especially given the high levels of illiteracy and low levels of education in some communities in the region. Anti-fracking groups therefore challenged the panel to accept all forms of public comments and encouraged citizens to create submissions in whatever format they chose: visual art, poetry, music, videos, and so forth. The panel was compelled to accept these unconventional submissions, creating a new “creative” category. Some of these submissions, such as songs, were performed at the public consultations, thus giving the panel very personal accounts of what fracking meant to communities. Organizers felt this change allowed citizens who might not have otherwise participated in the public consultations to contribute poignant statements about fracking.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The case of anti-fracking mobilization in western Newfoundland illustrates how concerned citizens without extensive activism experience built a successful campaign against a proposal that would have redefined the social and environmental geography of their region. This case provides a positive example of how rural communities, increasingly targeted for risky energy proposals, can defy expectations and fight unwanted projects. At the same time, it illustrates how central concepts from the social movement literature were enacted on the ground: local organizers drew on existing resources and built on their unique skills and community relationships to create grassroots mobilization, seized political opportunities, and thoughtfully framed culturally resonant messages.

The work of community members over the course of the four year campaign boosted civic capacity and transformed the social and political landscape of the region. Citizens with limited prior activist experience at the start of the campaign built skills, developed connections central to social activism, and experienced what it takes to oppose an extractive project successfully. One mobilization leader stated that thanks to this campaign, participants are now familiar with oil development regulators, the environmental assessment (EA) process, and ministers of key provincial departments. Moreover, they have become adept at community organizing and media relations. Organizers expected that in the future, citizens would direct this civic capacity to related regional development issues. One noted that “any [proposal] that comes down, we’re going to be demanding EAs, health impact statements, we’re going to be demanding that the oil companies that are going to drill will come under scrutiny. There will be protests.” From this point forward, we expect that future plans for extractive development in this region will be met with a strong local force advocating environmental integrity and authentic democratic participation. The local fracking mobilization in western Newfoundland has tilled rich soil that may well grow other forms of contestation.

There is a clear alignment between this campaign and proliferating instances of blockadia. As Klein explains, blockadia campaigns are usually made of non-activists with a strong connection to place who are concerned that fossil fuel extraction would “weaken or destroy” sectors like fisheries, tourism, and farming, closing off a community’s other economic options (p. 316). Participants of blockadia aim to preserve local identity, culture, and history. At the same time, their mobilization efforts are knit into a densely interconnected, transnational movement through which strategies and information are shared across the globe. These were certainly core characteristics of the western Newfoundland case, as was the primary focus on the extractive industry’s threat to water, which Klein observes as particularly fundamental in motivating resistance.

However, this case contrasts with Klein’s characterization of blockadia campaigns in that there was little attempt to link this local anti-fracking mobilization to a larger struggle against fossil fuel development and climate change. Klein argues that while blockadia participants are primarily protecting local places from extraction, they are also highly attuned to the global climate crisis and its origin in fossil fuel extraction (p. 304). Blockadia is in great part about communities saying “no new carbon frontiers” and “stopping real climate crimes in progress” (p. 295). This is echoed in new research on anti-fracking campaigns in which communities and NGOs use global issues and framings as a central part of their messaging to oppose fracking locally (Hopke 2016; Neville and Weinthal 2016). However, in western Newfoundland, organizers argue that one of the reasons the anti-fracking campaign was so successful is because it *strategically avoided* emphasizing climate change impacts or connecting this issue to larger concerns about the oil industry, on which NL’s economy is highly dependent. Mobilization leaders consciously omitted climate change from campaign messaging, even though most of them recognized its importance.

That said, these strategic omissions during the resistance to fracking by no means imply this local mobilization cannot contribute to a broader contestation to petro-capitalism. As noted by McAdam and Boudet (2012), “[w]ith rare exceptions,” broader social movements “began life as local struggles” (133) and they may also remain so for many of the movements’ participants. Reflecting on the history of American social movements, from civil rights to environmentalism, McAdam and Boudet observe that larger movements grow only as they “inspired or linked up with similar efforts elsewhere” (134). There is potential for these linkages to be made from the fracking resistance in western Newfoundland to a larger resistance movement to carbon extraction. Indeed this might be happening already, taking the form of temporary holds on fracking that are spreading across eastern Canada. Local alliances against this new technology might well develop into an Atlantic anti-fracking block, as one participant suggested, driven by grassroots Indigenous and settler community organizations.

In underscoring these ten central practices that contributed to the anti-fracking campaign’s success in western Newfoundland, this analysis may contribute to

the “cross-pollinating” (Klein, p. 322) process that is fundamental to the extension of blockadia. Although these practices are derived from a unique situation, they may serve as guideposts for other communities contesting the ongoing wave of extreme energy extraction.

References

- Arnold, Gwen, and Robert Holahan. 2014. "The Federalism of Fracking: How the Locus of Policy-Making Authority Affects Civic Engagement." *Publius* 44 (2): 344-68.
- Black Spruce Exploration Corp. 2013. Western Newfoundland update project magazine. 1(2), Summer.
- Boudet, Hilary, Dylan Bugden, Chad Zanocco, and Edward Maibach. 2016. "The Effect of Industry Activities on Public Support for ‘Fracking’." *Environmental Politics* 25(4): 593-612.
- Brake, Wendy, and Edward Addo. 2014. "Tourism and ‘Fracking’ in Western Newfoundland: Interests and Anxieties of Coastal Communities and Companies in the Context of Sustainable Tourism." *International Journal of Marine Science* 4(2):16-41.
- Cadigan, Sean. *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- Cadigan, Sean. "Want Amidst Plenty: The Oil Boom and the Working Class in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1992-2010." In *Workers in Hard Times: A Long View of Economic Crises*, edited by Leon Fink, Joseph A. McCartin and Joan Sangster, 187-212. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014.
- Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. 2012. The State of Canada's Parks: 2012 Report.
- Carter, Angela, and Emily Eaton. 2016. "Subnational Responses to Fracking in Canada: Explaining Saskatchewan's “Wild West” Regulatory Approach." *Review of Policy Research* 33 (4): 393-419.
- Carter, Angela, and Leah Fusco. 2017. "Western Newfoundland’s Anti-Fracking Campaign: Exploring the Rise of Unexpected Community Mobilization." *Journal of Rural and Community Development* 12(1):98-120.
- Davis, Charles, and Katherine Hoffer. 2012. "Federalizing energy? Agenda change and the politics of fracking." *Policy Sciences* 45(3):221-41.
- Eaton, Emily, and Abby Kinchy. 2016. "Quiet Voices in the Fracking Debate: Ambivalence, Nonmobilization, and Individual Action in Two Extractive Communities (Saskatchewan and Pennsylvania)." *Energy Research & Social Science* 20: 22-30.
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada. 2011. *Social, economic and cultural overview of Western Newfoundland and Southern Labrador*. OHSAR Pub. Ser. Rep. NL

Region, No. 0008. Retrieved from
<http://www.dfompo.gc.ca/Library/343358.pdf>

Fraser, G.S., & Ellis, J. 2008. "Offshore Hydrocarbon and Synthetic Hydrocarbon Spills in Eastern Canada: The Issue of Follow-up and Experience." *Journal of Environmental Assessment Policy and Management* 10: 173-187.

Fraser, G.S., & Ellis, J. 2009. "The Canada-Newfoundland Atlantic Accord Implementation Act: Transparency of the Environmental Management of the Offshore Oil and Gas Industry." *Marine Policy* 33: 312-316.

Freudenburg, William R., and Robert Gramling. 1994. *Oil in Troubled Waters: Perceptions, Politics, and the Battle over Offshore Drilling*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Fusco, Leah. 2008. *The Invisible Movement: The Newfoundland Environmental Movement's Response to the Offshore Oil Industry*. Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag.

Goodwin, Jeff and James M. Jasper. 1999. "Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory." *Sociological Forum* 14:27-54.

Hopke, Jill E. 2016. "Translocal Anti-Fracking Activism: An Exploration of Network Structure and Tie Content." *Environmental Communication* 10 (3): 380-94.

House, J. D. 1985. *The Challenge of Oil: Newfoundland's Quest for Controlled Development*. St. John's: ISER, MUN.

Howe, Myles. 2015. *Debriefing Elsipogtog: The Anatomy of a Struggle*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

Klein, Naomi. 2014. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada.

McAdam, Doug. 1982. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McAdam, Doug. 1994. "Culture and Social Movements." Pp. 36-57 in *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, edited by E. Laraña, H. Johnston, and J. R. Gusfield. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

McAdam, Doug, and Hilary Boudet. 2012. *Putting Social Movements in Their Place: Explaining Opposition to Energy Projects in the United States, 2000-2005*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

McCarthy, John D. 1996. "Constraints and Opportunities in Adopting, Adapting, and Inventing." Pp. 141-151 in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, edited by D. McAdam, J. D. McCarthy, and M. N. Zald. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

McGowan, Francis. 2014. "Regulating Innovation: European Responses to Shale Gas Development." *Environmental Politics* 23(1): 41-58.

Meyer, David S. 2002. "Opportunities and Identities: Bridge-Building in the Study of Social Movements." Pp. 20-38 in *Social Movements: Identity, Culture, and the State*, edited by D. Meyer, N. Whittier, and B. Robnett. New York: Oxford UP.

Meyer, David S. 2004. "Protest and Political Opportunities." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30:125-145.

Meyer, David and Debra Minkoff. 2004. "Conceptualizing Political Opportunity." *Social Forces* 82(4): 1457-92.

Neville, Kate J., and Erika Weinthal. 2016. "Scaling up Site Disputes: Strategies to Redefine 'Local' in the Fight against Fracking." *Environmental Politics* (in press).

Newfoundland and Labrador Hydraulic Fracturing Review Panel (NLHFRP). 2016. "Unconventional Opportunities & Challenges: Results of the Public Review of the Implications of Hydraulic Fracturing Operations in Western Newfoundland."

Peters, J., A. Carter, and S. Cadigan. "The Political Economy of the Labour Market in Newfoundland and Labrador." In *First among Unequals: The Premier, Politics, and Policy in Newfoundland and Labrador*, 247-64. Montréal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2014.

Tarrow, Sidney. 1994. *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Tourism Synergy Ltd., and Broad Reach Strategies. 2016. Gros Morne Regional Sustainable Tourism Plan.

Wiese, F. K., & Ryan, P. C. 2003. "The Extent of Chronic Marine Oil Pollution in Southeastern Newfoundland Waters Assessed Through Beached Bird Surveys 1984-1999." *Marine Pollution Bulletin* 46(9): 1090-1101.

Willow, Anna. 2016. "Wells and Well-being: Neoliberalism and Holistic Sustainability in the Shale Energy Debate." *Local Environment* 21(6): 768-88.

Wright, Marita. 2013. "Making it Personal: How Anti-Fracking Organizations Frame their Message." *Columbia University Journal of Politics and Society* 24(2): 107-25.

Zirakzadeh, Cyrus Ernesto. 2006. *Social Movements in Politics: A Comparative Study*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

About the authors

Leah Fusco is a Ph.D. candidate in geography at the University of Toronto. Her current research examines environmental assessment and review processes related to oil development in NL, including community participation and opposition to project proposals. fuscol AT geog.utoronto.ca

Angela Carter is an assistant professor at the University of Waterloo's Department of Political Science. She researches comparative environmental policy regimes surrounding oil developments primarily in Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Saskatchewan. avcarter AT uwaterloo.ca