

Powering the Planet - Why the World Needs Anthropologists

28–29 October 2017, Durham

Access for Women in Energy (AccessWIE) participated at the Fifth Edition of the annual symposium “Why the World Needs Anthropologists” which took place on 28-29 October 2017 in Durham. The event was organised and hosted by Durham University, which, via its Energy Institute, has a history of researching sustainable energy and energy systems’ integration.

Social scientists, scientists, engineers, economists, students, businesses, community groups and energy sector professionals from all over the world attended the event. The gathering was sponsored by the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA), Durham Energy Institute, Institute of Advanced Study and Department of Anthropology at Durham University.



AccessWIE members at the Energy Hotspot exhibition area

AccessWIE engaged with enthusiasts from different energy background at the Energy Hotspot exhibition area. Our group showcased the blend of social science with energy, highlighting the vital role of women in the energy industry, discussing topical energy issues, inspiring graduates and young

professionals, sharing the group’s experience, and giving career advice in the industry.

‘Powering the Planet’ explored how energy professionals and anthropologists can cooperate to design and deploy energy innovations that alter the world for the better. The topics discussed included, among others: assessment of the energy system; why the world needs anthropologists for a sustainable energy transition; and the different ways anthropologists, economists and engineers approach the energy world and how these differences can be reconciled.

The event was officially opened by Sandra Bell, Member of Durham Energy Institute Advisory Board; Maggie Bosanquest, Low Carbon Economic Development Manager for Durham County Council; and conveyors of EASA Applied Anthropology Network.

Keynote speakers included:

- Benj Sykes, UK Country Manager and Head of Programme Asset Management at DONG Energy’s Offshore Wind Power, gave a presentation on transforming people, places and power;
- Sophie Bouly de Lesdain, Expert Researcher at Electricité de France (EDF), discussed whether anthropology can contribute to the development of solar energy;
- Tanja Winther, Associate Professor at Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo, examined the role of anthropologists in the search for solutions to the energy dilemma; and
- Veronica Strang, Executive Director of the Institute of Advanced Study, Durham University, covered empowering infrastructures: water, steel and stone.

POWERING THE PLANET - WHY THE WORLD NEEDS ANTHROPOLOGISTS

Mining Tour

At the end of the event, AccessWIE participated in the walking mining tour that featured the hidden history of Durham as the center of what was once the largest coalfield in England.



Key Highlights

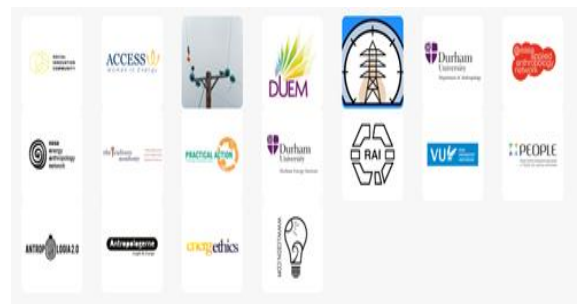
- We cannot drive the transition of the energy system to decarbonization and lead the green transformation by taking just a technological approach. The human factor is a vital element.
 - A big challenge to the energy transition is to get people to adapt to new technologies. How people and energy interact and understand that will be critical to the success of the energy transition. This, however, raises the question over the data that needs to be made available to make this work.
 - In several areas of the energy transition, people will need to adopt things which are good for society and good for the environment but do not necessarily have direct visible benefit for the individuals whose behaviour we are asking to change. That is a really challenging question that anthropologists look into.
 - Electricity reality is changing. Consumers are going to turn into “prosumers” – both producers and consumers of electricity. You cannot generate electricity without having an impact. A holistic approach is needed to investigate gains and losses.
- The energy transition is well under way, with offshore wind being a significant part of it.
 - The cost of offshore wind has fallen by 50 percent over the last two years and its usage has seen a five- to six-fold increase between 2010 and 2017. One rotation of a blade can power a home for 24 hours.
 - Renewable energy will dominate the electricity mix in the future. By 2040, half of the UK electricity will be coming from renewables.
 - Coal is dead in the US – it does not make sense economically no matter what the White House thinks.
 - The promoted goal and result of heat pumps are different to the actual ones. The results might point out additional benefits on top of the promoted goal – to analyze the impact shows complexity, which can be translated to policy approaches.
 - No one solution fits all. The same policy has different consequences and interpretations in different countries.
 - France energy system is centralised, nuclear-reliant and the development of renewables in the country is based on financial incentives. Producers sell to EDF the electricity they produce at state-fixed prices. The PhotoVoltaic (PV) purchasing prices were especially high between 2006-2010 and many people decided to become PV producers. From 2010 prices dropped and this resulted in greater diversity amongst producers’ profile and moved from financial logic to more domestic (self-consumption) logic.



Panel discussion on the development of new sustainable solutions for energy production and consumption

POWERING THE PLANET - WHY THE WORLD NEEDS ANTHROPOLOGISTS

- Power production of oil-rich Norway relies mainly on hydroelectricity (>90%).
- Accessibility to energy can also be a motive for PV production.
- Why install solar panels when one is already connected to the power grid? People producing their own solar electricity want autonomy but this is locally specific. In the case of Corsica, energy autonomy leads to political autonomy.
- The energy dilemma: we need to reduce energy consumption but also make electricity available to those without access. Does access to energy electricity equal to empowerment? – a question anthropologists examine.
- Energy access is increasing but technologies are falling into despair. Ethnographic research methods are particularly suited to understand this.
- A discipline gap exists between engineers and anthropologists. That the world needs engineers is taken for granted.
- Anthropologists can help design a new social contract with electricity and the grid.
- The biggest challenge for the discipline of anthropologists is to provide recommendations.
- What constitutes an orderly world? – Anthropologists try to create a world of order and stability through empowering infrastructures.
- Anthropologists should look at what people value regarding energy use in terms of their life ways to engage them.



Participating organisations from the energy industry and non-for-profit sector

To watch the stream, click [here](#).

Interviews with the speakers are available [here](#).

Access for Women in Energy (AccessWIE) establishes a community of practice, offering women a peer-group platform to meet with their contemporaries both female and male in the private and the public sectors across the world of energy.

AccessWIE engages its members in regular informed debates on global energy related issues. These are usually held on a quarterly basis and include seminars, business meetings and roundtable discussions to address strategic issues involving energy globally. Our central aim is to support the development of women in the energy sector – across the whole supply chain related services and all sources of energy: from oil, gas and coal to renewables and nuclear.

AccessWIE was founded in 2007 by Dr Carole Nakhle, who is the Chief Executive Officer of Crystol Energy. The group is co-chaired by Lady Judge (The Hon. Barbara Thomas), Chairman Emerita of the UK Atomic Energy Authority, and Lord Howell, President of the Royal Commonwealth Society and of the UK Energy Industries Council.

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