



Listening to Energy Transition: How Soundwalks Reveal Tensions in Aberdeen's Energy Transition Development

- **Energy transition projects can threaten to reproduce persistent inequities and disenfranchisement** caused by earlier energy developments. Like other governmental actions, policy-making and planning for energy transition are often reduced to a **narrow set of future goals**, privileging economic opportunity over a comprehensive, multi-sensory appraisal of how social justice and inclusion are experienced locally.
- Creative and collaborative methodologies, such as those deployed by the 'Living with Energy Transition' project, mobilise **different ways of sensing and knowing lived energy environments**.

The project's sound walks have drawn attention to the **slow processes of sonic enclosure**—that is, the way that sound travels through and occupies space—which negatively impact residents and contribute to tensions around energy transition developments.

Policy Recommendations

Current local and national-level policy (e.g., the [2009 Scotland Climate Change Act](#) and its [2019 Amendment](#); the [Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2023-2028](#); [Net Zero Aberdeen Routemap 2045](#); and the [Aberdeen Climate Adaptation Framework](#)), have only **limited considerations for the broader sensory impact of energy developments**; neither do institutional structures such as the [Scottish Just Transition Commission](#), the Scottish Government's [£500m Just Transition Fund](#), [Aberdeen's Net Zero Leadership Board](#), and [Transition Delivery Unit](#).

Recommendations therefore include:

- The need for **Health, Equalities and Environmental Impacts Assessments** to guide policies.
- **Participatory mapping** (counter and cognitive mapping) necessary to **understand how projects could be experienced** by residents and others.
- **Community energy and conservation projects must be central** to funding.

Key context

Living with Energy Transition fostered attentiveness to the ongoing audible transformations of St. Fittick's Park without overdetermining the result of our inquiry. Soundwalkers engaged in a collaborative knowledge-production—by walking, searching for, generating, and absorbing sound around the park—exploring **how the results of (invisible) energy-related politics and planning become audible**.

Living with Energy Transition consisted of a series of public soundwalks led by artists Maja Zećo and Rachel Grant. They involved forms of attentive listening and expanded on extended qualitative research carried out between 2021 and 2023 by urbanist William Otchere-Darko and anthropologist Gisa Weszkalnys. Living with Energy Transition moved beyond the premise of academic research, constituting an open-ended inquiry into the sonic contradictions characteristic of many contested sites of energy transition.

The soundwalks focused on St. Fittick's Park, a green space on the southern edge of Aberdeen, UK, partially earmarked for development as an energy transition zone (ETZ). Local opposition to the ETZ project points to the significance of the park as an ecological sanctuary for residents of nearby Torry, a former fishing village and working-class neighbourhood, which has long carried the burden of Aberdeen's energy and associated industrial development.

The Future

Insight into how people experience and respond to complex sonic environments should be critical to ongoing and future planning processes and policy-making around energy transition development. This can be achieved by centring creative and inclusionary methodologies and open-ended forms of enquiry around questions such as: How are **the politics of energy development** sensed in multiple ways? Who are **the different listeners and agents** who inhabit and make use of spaces affected by energy developments? What **sonic and other sensory tensions** do people identify around such sites? **What would a 'just energy transition' sound like?**



Source: Author's own photograph

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