Discourse and Institutions: Why Keystone XL Was Approved, and Why It Was Not

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Current public debate about oil-sands development focuses on individual pipeline decisions. Each is presented as an ultimatum — a binary choice between project approval and lost economic opportunity. This approach artificially restricts discussions to only a fraction of the consequences of oil development, such as short-term economic gains and job creation, and local impacts on human health and the environment. Lost is a broader conversation about national and international energy and economic strategies, and their trade-offs with environmental justice and conservation.

– Palen et al. (2014, 466)

Over the last 30 years, the business community and business scholars have taken up a great interest in environmental impacts, and environmental sustainability. The academic landscape in this area is characterized by a giant chasm right through the middle. At the heart is an enormous amount of environmental data that has been produced by businesses, for businesses. On one side of the chasm, this abstract data is assembled into neat insights on business and environmental impacts, or investor attitudes (Flammer and Bansal 2017; Yan, Almandoz, and Ferraro 2021e.g.,). On the other side of the chasm, there is a stream of literature that disassembles and question the validity of the metrics and indicators (Chatterji, Levine, and Toffel 2009; Chatterji et al. 2016; Eccles, Lee, and Stroehle 2020e.g.,).

Institutional theory scholarship *has* previously been used to circumnavigated the chasm.

Maguire and Hardy (2009) tackle the deinstitutionalization of DDT–a pesticide with clear environmental impacts.

This research represents an effort to circumnavigate the chasm by focusing research on a *Ding* (Latour 2005)–a specific instance or source of environmental impacts. Institutional scholarship *has* previously

the opportunity afforded by Keystone XL is that

remains abstract

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