



CSA-SCS Student  
Concerns Subcommittee

## *Student Spotlight*



# Jen Kostuchuk

She/Her

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### **“Even if I won the lottery, I’d still work in solar”: Why green jobs appeal to skilled trades workers who are not passionate environmentalists**

Researchers and climate justice activists are urgently calling for the transition of workers out of carbon-intensive (and sometimes dangerous) sectors and into greener ones. Despite the emergence of new green jobs, many workers are reluctant to pursue these career pathways because they do not consider themselves environmentalists or are concerned about experiencing job insecurity in potentially low-paying positions. While existing literature suggests that individuals with strong environmental values are more likely to pursue environmentally sustainable work, less is understood about what would drive people into green jobs when they do not necessarily hold these steadfast principles. Indeed, the experiences and roles of skilled trades workers working with green technologies are often overlooked in climate scholarship.

This study addresses that sociological puzzle through 50 in-depth interviews with workers in the heat pump & solar panel sector. How do these workers describe their motivations for entering (and staying in) these sectors, and to what extent do these green jobs meet their objective material needs? Understanding green job motivation is vital for shaping inclusive recruitment strategies that support a just transition policy framework, one aligned with workers’ lived experiences. Given the global labour shortage of skilled tradespeople, this research challenges conventional assumptions about the workplace culture & highlights the social, economic, and personal benefits of working with green technology.



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### **Additional project insights...**

The motivation for this project stemmed from the ongoing calls for new green jobs, and yet “academics have spent more time forecasting the future of green jobs than measuring the present” (Pettinger 2017:163). This underscores the need for empirical studies that analyze the working conditions & job satisfaction of workers in *existing* green jobs, such as skilled tradespeople who install heat pumps & solar panels.

Engaging in academic research that intersects with applied sociology, activism, and community involvement is essential to me. Taking a meaningful, over bountiful approach in knowledge mobilization is key. Beyond publishing my work for academic purposes, I will co-create, design, and deliver educational resources (such as accessible pamphlets & interactive workshops on what constitutes a good green job) to promote safety on site, work-life balance, and fair compensation. This will be useful for current and future green employers, workers, and student apprentices. I will also engage in public sociology by developing evidence-based policy recommendations that address how emerging green economies can disrupt social inequalities in favour of commitments to gender equity and competitive wages. This research has important implications for green job development and policy, as well as for our understanding of how societies transition not only toward a better ecological future. but also toward transformed workplace cultures in male-dominated trades by challenging longstanding social norms.

### **More About Jen Kostuchuk...**

I have worked on several interdisciplinary projects. Most recently, I joined the University of Victoria’s Institute for Integrated Energy Systems.

In 2024, I received WorkSafeBC’s Research Training Award and in 2023, the Students in Community: Engaging Meaningfully Award.

Beyond academia, I enjoy actively contributing to local organizations dedicated to addressing climate change and advancing labour standards through applied and community-engaged research. I organized with the Worker Solidarity Network as their climate and labour project coordinator. In this role, I conducted community outreach, hosted educational workshops, and launched a campaign calling on the provincial government to establish a maximum temperature policy.

The most valuable lesson I have learned is that scholarship should not happen in isolation. It is essential to not only amplify the voices and stories of community members & workers, but to listen and collaborate alongside them.