Solarize

Understanding and Assessing the Past, Present, and Future of Solarize

A Presentation for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County

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Outline

* Dissertation and Solarize
* Research Methodology
* Key Themes
* After Solarize
* Conclusions
Increasing focus on community-based programs as drivers of change.

Under-conceptualization of the role of communities in the academic literature.

This research: Solarize as a case study; Two aims:
- Add to the literature
- Better understand Solarize and provide insight for future campaigns
The Program

“One Stop Shop For Solar”

1. Installer Selection
   * RFP, Installer Bid, and Selection

2. Public Outreach Campaign
   * Raising awareness, Increasing education, and Enrollment

3. Installation
   * Site assessments, Decision-making, and Installations
Solarize Portland

Six Neighborhoods

560 Installations

1.7 MW Added

Figure 1. Annual Portland Residential Solar PV Installations By Year (Irvine et al, 2012)
Solarize Since 2009...

Widespread Implementation*:

17 states

86 different communities
Research Methodology

* Literature review
  Journal articles, campaign reports, news articles, etc

* National survey of Solarize campaigns
  
  **Aim:** Gain a broad understanding of the Solarize campaign, its characteristics, and experiences associated with it.

* Interviews with stakeholders from different Solarize programs
  
  **Aim:** More detailed picture, illustrate themes from the survey
Results

Key Themes

* Increased Solar PV Installations
* Community Outreach and Education
* Economic Factors
* Working with Installers
1. Increased Installations

What people said:

* 47% respondents listed as primary motivation for implementing Solarize.
* #1 reason cited for considering a program a success.
* Installation goals often exceeded.

Challenges:

* Capacity of selected installers (more later).
* Handling the influx of customers.
* Managing the data.

Suggestions:

* Visions and expectations.
2. Community Outreach and Education

What people said:

* 50% listed as a top benefit of Solarize.
* “it was an action that would bring the citizens of the town into their own activity, their own actions, and for an awful lots of things that’s the limiting factor....”

Challenges:

* Getting the word out and marketing.
* ‘Extending beyond the choir’
* Keeping volunteers energized and motivated.

Suggestions:

* Intermediary organizations and networking.
* Have a plan.
Secondary Effects:

*I do find that even putting solar in at least connects people with their consumption.* When you ask them about their electric bill, they have no idea how much electricity they use, and then when they put in a PV system, *now at least they have an awareness of what their consumption is.*

*I do think one of the key things about Solarize is educating people and then having them certainly plant a seed, having them talk to their neighbors and spread the word* so there is a little bit of a lag time there and I think that’s an important part of the program.
3. Economic Factors

What people said:
* 53% respondents cited as top benefit of the program.
* “It’s not any longer that you either do a good thing or the right thing or an exciting self sufficient thing OR you do an economic thing, now for a lot of people those two things are the same thing. Not for everybody yet, but for a lot of people.”

Challenges:
* Changing perceptions about who can afford solar.
* Financing – loans, rebates, tax credits.
* Creating a monopoly / price fixing.

Suggestions:
* Education and peer effects.
What people said:

* Installer vetting a strength of the program – helps with simplicity.

“My opinion in general is that community solar programs require the installers to step up their game and to me, it’s no longer two guys and a truck...it builds confidence in the community but it really does require installers to step up their game. And I think the customers are the ones that benefit from that.”

Challenges:

* From the organizer perspective:
  
The selection process
  Communication with installers
  Pushback from those not selected
  Aligning motivations
4. Working with Installers

Challenges:

* From the installer perspective:
  
  A different business model
  Pricing
  Ability to handle capacity
  Influx of customers
  Uncertainty

Suggestions:

* Involve the installers from the beginning.
* Greater monitoring and evaluation.
* 54% of respondents did NOT run the program again.

Not allowed with Solarize Mass
Funding
Diminishing returns
Time and Energy

“My dear hope is that there is no future to [Solarize] – if it worked properly we’ll be out of here after this program and it will be a self perpetuating process....It’s the way Solarize is supposed to work.”
46% of respondents \textbf{did} run the program again.

\textbf{Examples}:

- Multi-installer.
- Targeted marketing.
- Solar Cooperatives.
- Application to new technology or sector.
Reflections

* Every town is different.

* Is there an ideal size?

* Involve all sectors and stakeholders.

* What makes Solarize special?
Summary and Conclusions

* Solarize provides a great example of what communities are capable of.

* Great tool to help achieve sustainability goals.

* Going forward, more attention should focus on the installer relationship.
Questions?

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