

Sustainability in the Global City: Myth and Practice (New Directions in Sustainability and Society)

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Cities play a pivotal but paradoxical role in the future of our planet. As world leaders and citizens grapple with the consequences of growth, pollution, climate change, and waste, urban sustainability has become a ubiquitous catchphrase and a beacon of hope. Yet, we know little about how the concept is implemented in daily life - particularly with regard to questions of social justice and equity. This volume provides a unique and vital contribution to ongoing conversations about urban sustainability by looking beyond the promises, propaganda, and policies associated with the concept in order to explore both its mythic meanings and the practical implications in a variety of everyday contexts. The authors present ethnographic studies from cities in eleven countries and six continents. Each chapter highlights the universalized assumptions underlying interpretations of sustainability while elucidating the diverse and contradictory ways in which people understand, incorporate, advocate for, and reject sustainability in the course of their daily lives.

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Editorial Review

Review
"Urban policy makers focused on sustainability often ignore the growth of eco-apartheid in their own cities. The contributors to this invaluable book confront the issue head-on, through exhaustive ethnographic research, and show us how and why environmental justice is the key to a green urban future."
Andrew Ross, author of Bird on Fire: Lessons from the World's Least Sustainable City

"In this groundbreaking work, the centrality of sustainability to the contemporary city and its interlocking systems of urban policy, politics, and planning is revealed through ethnographic case studies and vivid snapshots of real-world places. This is a collective achievement of anthropologists working together to reframe a field that is at the forefront of the discipline."
Setha Low, The Graduate Center, The City University of New York

"This volume confronts the uncomfortable question of whether cities can ever be sustainable. Why do the lofty goals blind cities to environmental and social realities on the ground? Interrogating sustainability schemes such as branding, post-disaster rebuilding, and planning policies, the authors reveal environmental inconsistencies and exclusionary conditions produced when neoliberal interests are privileged."
Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

"I highly recommend this collection of essays, and hope to have a chance to use it in teaching. It provides insightful and nuanced perspectives on how the language of sustainability is used, how programs get deployed, and their differential impacts on communities."
Stephanie Pincetl, The Nature of Cities (www.thenatureofcities.com)

"This volume, of potential interest to anyone whose work deals with sustainability, approaches the subject from an ethnographic perspective. Rather than attempting to impose a fixed definition, the authors approach sustainability as "discourse" and "myth", with case studies from around the world showing that differing definitions have practical implications for both conservation and social justice ... "Green" products are markers of status; the poor cannot afford them, so can be blamed for "harming the environment" despite their smaller ecological footprint. (Carman's chapter on the persecution of shantytown residents near an Argentinian nature reserve shows this most spectacularly.) ... [Hornborg] provocatively questions whether affluence really facilitates sustainability, as we are often told, contrasting the "high-tech, high-cost image of sustainability" - buying the products that greenwash a comfortable lifestyle - with a "low-tech, low-cost definition that seems less glamorous but more aligned with social justice"."
Wendy L. Applequist, Economic Botany

About the Author
Cindy Isenhour is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Maine, Orono. Drawing on ecological and institutional economics, her research interests are focused on sustainability policy and practice, particularly how they relate to issues of consumerism and environmental justice. With support from the Fulbright Program, the American-Scandinavian Foundation, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Isenhour has most recently conducted research on anti-consumption sustainability movements and sustainable-consumption policies in Sweden. She has published in American Ethnologist, the Journal of Consumer Behavior, Local Environment, Conservation and Society, City and Society, and in several edited collections.

Gary McDonogh is Professor of Growth and Structure of Cities at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania. His work focuses on how people actually re-create places and cities, whether from positions of power, through disfranchised struggles, or within the remapping of global flows, creating downtowns, transnational enclaves, and diverse suburbs. He is the author of Good Families of Barcelona (1986), Black and Catholic in Savannah (1992) and Iberian Worlds (2008); co-author of Global Hong Kong (2005); and co-editor of Cultural Meanings of Space and Place (1993), Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Culture (2003) and Global Downtowns (2011). He has published articles in major anthropological, historical, and geographic journals in the United States and Spain and is currently engaged in a multi-site study of the social history, form, image, and meanings of global Chinatowns.

Melissa Checker is Associate Professor of Urban Studies at Queens College and Associate Professor of Anthropology and Environmental Psychology at the City University of New York Graduate Center. She is the author of Polluted Promises: Environmental Racism and the Search for Justice in a Southern Town (2005) and the co-editor of Local Actions: Cultural Activism, Power, and Public Life (2004). She is also a founding co-editor of the Public Anthropology Reviews section of American Anthropologist. She has published articles in American Anthropologist, City and Society, Capitalism, Nature, Socialism, Souls, Human Organization, Urban Anthropology, and numerous anthologies. She has also published widely in mainstream print and online venues.

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