

# Green Is the New Black

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“In order to create a fully sustainable society we must deconstruct it to consume less” (Barnett, 2013).

“Sustainability” is the chic, nouveau movement of the moment that seemingly everybody wants to be a part of. With attitudes towards the environment slowly changing due to its new found fashionable status, nowadays the only accessory to be seen with is the mother-nature saving bicycle. As individuals are finally asserting themselves to the dangers of global warming and climate change, it *appears* that for this period of modernity “Green is the new Black”. But to what extent do we really understand the

importance of this new vision of “sustainable living”? Is society really embracing the evidence science has produced or is this merely just the latest “trend” that individuals want to be *seen* to be a part of? For most, the reality of climate change is often ignored with attitudes of detachment and relinquished

responsibility, perhaps because its effects are not necessarily observable (Barnett, 2013). Some sceptics have even questioned if the notion of climate change is true (Cordon, 2010). However, with overwhelming evidence to support the claims that man-made climate change is occurring (Cordon, 2010) it is our

responsibility to adapt the way we live in order to curb the damage we are causing our environment and retain what is left of Earth’s natural resources. This reflection will critique the notion of “sustainable living”, whilst integrating module themes of consumerism, migration, waste and climate change.

To begin with, a new global attitude is needed concerning waste and over-consumption. In the UK alone we throw away “8.3 million tonnes of uneaten food every year” (Evans et al., 2013:18), with over half of this avoidable. To put this into perspective, our food waste is

equivalent to “20 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions”

(Evans et al., 2013) – or a quarter of all emissions

produced by UK cars. Although the Government has tried to be instrumental in bringing [food]

waste to the forefront of British thinking with the setting up of programmes such as WRAP (Waste and Resource Action Programme), the statistics illustrate that these initiatives to curb wastage have had little impression. The problem is how to convince people that collectively individual actions have a global impact. Germany, where the Green party is popular with a number of seats in parliament is



an example where the government has been instrumental in increasing sustainable behaviour. With a quarter of Germany's consumed energy produced by renewable [energy] sources and a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions of 25.5 per cent between 1990 and 2012 the country has managed to reduce its carbon dioxide emissions considerably (The Federal Government, 2013). The German example needs to be mirrored globally. We need a new era of "sustainable living", which must be aided by our participation in more environmentally friendly forms of consumption" (Evans, 2011: 553). Arguably "eco" forms of consuming such as growing (and selling) one's own produce and making compost heaps to reduce food waste are impractical for most and although these small measures should be seen as attempts to live more sustainably, in reality will not lessen the problem we are facing in regards to sustainable consumption. Evans (2011: 551) argues more convincingly that what is required is "a complete overhaul of the ways in which consumption is socially and technically organised".

Theorists such as Schor and Clift (2008, quoted in Evans, 2011: 551) argue that in fact "sustainable consumption is best served by the purchase of expensive items". Although controversial, Clift (2008, cited in Evans, 2011: 551) found that individuals with the lowest carbon footprints were those who invested in luxury goods, as the items' high quality reduced the need to buy again. However, the increase in cheap high street shops has enforced the "throw away culture", emphasising society's preference of quantity over quality (Ritzer, 2011) with current marketing practices emphasising consumption at low prices – an example being replacement upgrades for mobile phones. In an era where material objects portray who we are there is a

collective mentality that only unfashionable and "uncool" people hang onto items such as old phones. Therefore, consumption has now arguably become inherent in defining *who* we are by *what* we have.

The petrol guzzling car now arguably epitomises all things non-sustainable. Dependant on oil, theorists such as DeCicco and Fung (2006) claim the car is "the world's largest source of global warming"; the cars' greenhouse gas emissions vastly contributing to climate change. Not only are their emissions harmful to the planet, but with over 650 million worldwide (Urry, 2010) they are dwindling a finite resource – oil. With the discovery of oil resources relatively stagnant since the 1970s it has been suggested we have already reached "global peak oil", meaning we have extracted half of all the globe's potential oil resources (Urry, 2010). Although others believe we are yet to reach peak oil, it is clear our global addiction to consuming oil is not sustainable. As Homer-Dixon (2006) states, with worldwide systems of global



consumption set to double by 2050 there is simply not enough oil to fuel them. Therefore a new attitude towards consumption is needed. Hinton and Goodman (2010: 74) argue this approach must have an *ethical dimension* at its helm – they believe we must consume differently "in order to reduce adverse environmental impacts". This ethical dimension should be seen as an attempt to "right our wrongs" in regards to the impacts of our overconsumption on future generations, non-human ecosystems and the environment (Evans, 2011), as our habits have undoubtedly altered the diversity of life on earth.

Even without convincing people of the ethics of car consumption, simple and logical policy change makes a huge difference. In London the introduction of the congestion charge coupled with vast areas of restricted parking, combined

with improved public transport, car-sharing schemes and cycle lanes has significantly reduced the number of cars on the road and has changed public attitudes to owning and driving cars (Transport for London, 2007). Furthermore, the introduction of the “Ultra Low Emissions System” (ULED) means drivers of the lowest emission car are exempt from the charge

(Sunderland, 2013); this will hopefully encourage drivers in the Capital to choose environmentally friendly cars – the reward

being a mass saving of capital. Such measures, if adopted on a global level would make a huge difference in carbon dioxide emissions and therefore help reduce global warming.

Scientists are now warning that rising levels of carbon dioxide may affect the geology of the planet (McKie, 2009); with ever increasing levels of global warming it is predicted that climate change will increase the number of natural disasters, thus increasing the levels of migration as people will be forced to flee their homes. Especially an issue for developing countries, environmental migration may cause instability within host countries due to pressures on areas such as employment and resources (Drabo and Myabe, 2011). Moreover, the frequency of natural disasters in developing countries has increased and with that so too have the costs; it is estimated on average to cost 5% of the GDP (IMF, 2003 cited in Drabo and Myabe, 2011), leaving them in a “poverty trap”. Perhaps the first world will only “wake up” to the rising levels of carbon dioxide when the consequences in terms of natural disasters are nearer to home. However, with rising levels of carbon dioxide emissions due to our overconsumption it is only a matter of time before these fears of natural disasters *will* become a reality, potentially even bringing Tsunamis to the UK’s seas (McKie, 2009).

But what will it take for people to actually take notice of the magnitude of the problem we are facing? With the incessant warnings of



scientists mostly unheeded is it just too late? Although the damage we have imposed on the earth up until now is largely irreversible, policy changes on a global level together with changes in our shared collective consciousness regarding the importance of sustainable consumption and a more sustainable way of life will have an impact on global warming.

However, this will have to be combined with copious economic help for poorer regions of the world for whom such changes will have a negative economic impact. When “Green”

policies are introduced at a local level – for example through the introduction and collection of recycling bins and restrictive car policies, people feel *enabled* to behave in more sustainable ways. Without policy changes at a local, central and international Government level, being “Green” will remain the province and luxury of the affluent few.

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#### Picture 1:

<http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=vintage+green+bicycle>

#### Picture 2:

[http://i1.cpcache.com/product/217500852/green\\_is\\_the\\_new\\_black\\_tote\\_bag.jpg?height=460&width=460&qv=90](http://i1.cpcache.com/product/217500852/green_is_the_new_black_tote_bag.jpg?height=460&width=460&qv=90)

#### Picture 3:

<http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=176>