

## **Saving the Sustainable City from Itself: Carbon, Collective Consumption Struggles, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Urbanization**

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With Shell Oil joining the list of institutions promoting low-carbon, compact city urbanism, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish Mike Davis's (2010) call for an urbanist solution to global ecological crisis from corporate eco-modernism. For critical urban studies to save the baby of objectively sustainable, egalitarian urbanism from all that murky bathwater, it must connect cutting edge carbon accounting to a revitalized conception of collective consumption. It must then learn to see the struggles of urban social movements over the substance of collective consumption—including housing, land use, safety from natural disasters, and access to ecological goods (like clean water—as central to producing the urban climate politics of the near future.

One key argument is that urban consumption patterns indirectly but profoundly produce both local and distant carbon emissions, and thus shape global ecologies; and second, these patterns flow from the trinity of housing, land use, and transit politics, the constitutive elements of a socio-ecological politics of collective consumption. I code these in terms of the opposition between green and grey ecologies on one axis, and luxury and democratic ecologies on the other. Green ecologies refer to measures taken to improve direct relations with what is broadly understood as nature—from parks to air quality to extreme weather defenses. Grey ecologies refer to measures that by virtue of efficiencies reduce pollution and/or resource use, from sewage infrastructure to dense urban clusters anchored by affordable housing. The more egalitarian these politics, in particular the “grey ecologies”, the lower carbon emissions are likely to be. But these politics, whether they concern urban cores or suburban formations, are not the exclusive domain of municipal policymaking.

A second key argument is that these same collective consumption politics are also central to battles over recovery from natural disasters, like hurricanes, or surviving slow-moving ecological scarcities, like drought. It is through broad-based struggles over collective consumption that green and grey ecologies, each tethered to climate change, ultimately connect.

This paper draws on three years of dissertation fieldwork in New York City and São Paulo, including over 120 interviews, extensive ethnographic observation, and document analysis. The empirical findings of that research are explored in greater detail elsewhere. Here they are mobilized to inform a broader theoretical argument that a revitalized, socio-ecological conception of collective consumption helps urbanists see the relationships between apparently local struggles over a range of state-facilitated goods and services and the planetary crisis of climate change.