

John M Meyer and Jens Kersten (eds)

The Greening of Everyday Life: Challenging Practices, Imagining Possibilities

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This volume offers an excellent analysis of everyday greening initiatives by individuals and communities. It discusses the challenges of changing everyday habits. Many authors utilise field research to illustrate a wide variety of approaches, ways motivations can be counter-intuitive and in which policy-based market signals can modify and intensify sustainable behaviours.

An introduction and sixteen chapters cover a wide range of adaptation contexts including households, infrastructure innovation, biodiversity, mobility and ecovillage life. In most chapters cultural, economic, psychological, sociological and other factors are considered. The book is insightful and a pleasure to read. I cannot discuss each chapter individually, but do recommend them all.

Andrew Case (Chapter 2) offers a critique of the impact of the 1989 runaway best-seller *50 Simple Things You Can Do to Save the Earth*. *50 Simple Things* made environmental protection all too easy, but drew millions into adjusting their lives in small ways. What it missed was that changes to everyday life need not be small and can involve buying avoidance as well as shopping differently. Meyer and Kersten's volume, in contrast, addresses many larger change possibilities from collective communities to redesigned homes, land use changes and energy production as well as travelling both differently and less.

Looking even larger, Fiona Allen (Chapter 3) considers larger-than-household water infrastructure systems and Teena Gabrielson (Chapter 5) discusses the effects of social class (versus the emphasis on household by household adjustments) regarding toxicity risks. Michael Lorr (Chapter 7) compares green renovations and building in Chicago and Jacksonville, pointing out ways greening is limited by a dominant 1950s mentality. He offers a conclusion that places green housing choices in a context of a need for deeper changes: 'This version of greener urbanism ... misses the opportunity for deeper, legally stronger, and socially just sustainabilities – greening that would rely less on whether people see green as a cool commodity and more on a democratic public taking responsibility and accountability for the resources their societies consume collectively' (p. 132).

Three chapters on land use also identify challenges and limits. Syed Randle (Chapter 8) addresses 'unpaving' initiatives and the limits of volunteerism. Shannon Orr thoughtfully looks at the challenges of suburban zoning for those wanting to rethink the use of backyards. And Jens Kersten discusses possibilities for urban biodiversity. I found this latter chapter particularly hopeful in terms of the biodiversity that still exists in urban settings and the promise of improvements that might be made.

Two chapters on mobility, Chapter 13 on automobility (John Meyer) and Chapter 14 on cycling (Yogi Hendlin) were particularly interesting to me. I recently bought an electric car and solar panels. In the process I fretted over all manner of policy and personal issues, including ageing and extravagance. Meyer makes clear that automobility impacts are less about the vehicles than impacts on and of land use and settlement patterns. Electric cars do not avoid those impacts – though their current range limits may. I found that I now take fewer trips and opt for transit more. As a result I have mixed feelings about potential EV range improvements.

Hendlin brilliantly conveys cycling's ethos and challenges. Cars rule the roads 'granting cycling little latitude to freely compete as a viable form of mobility' (p. 232). Redesigning roads is a complex undertaking. I hold Copenhagen and Amsterdam in awe and my nephew's wife is an environmental engineer doing cycle route design in Maryland. Hendlin shows the ways most cyclists in North America are still second class citizens – and why this may not be entirely a bad thing in terms of motivating needed change of many kinds.

Chapter 15 by Karen Litfin and Chapter 16 by Chelsea Schelly focus on alternative communities including communes and co-ops as well as alternative dwellings. Case studies involve community sharing under varying rules. In all communities consumption is diminished through sharing and much is self-produced. I was surprised that I had a connection to one community studied by Schelly (Twin Oaks in rural Virginia). There, even incomes are shared and food is often self-produced. They prepared the index for my recent book. I knew little about the community other than that they indexed social science and environmental titles. I can report that the job was done well for a reasonable price.

Schelly also makes a surprising finding regarding the motivation of solar adopters. Many adopters were unconcerned about environmental factors. They were motivated by a need for greater independence. This also drove them to consume less energy in a quest to see their meters running backwards. As an adopter I can attest to the appeal of this quest to the environmentally inclined as well. These motivational findings are important because they potentially broaden the appeal of local and community-based renewable energy. Apparently even some climate deniers will adopt, and reduce energy use, if self-sufficiency motivations and economic incentives are right.

Overall this volume is academically important because it grounds greening in theoretically-grounded case-based research. Simultaneously, it is also helpful to those considering the personal and political implications of greening their own everyday existence.

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