



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

PROGRAMME

The Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(Department of sociology)

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2003	Université de Montréal	MSc
1999	Université de Montréal	BSc

“Constructing Climate Capitalism: Corporate Power and the Global Climate Policy-Planning Network”

Wednesday, December 3, 2014
10:00AM

David Turpin Building, room A137

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. William K. Carroll, Department of Sociology, University of
Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Min Zhou, Department of Sociology, UVic (Member)

Dr. R. Michael M’Gonigle, School of Environmental Studies,
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External Examiner:

Dr. Brett Clark, Department of Sociology, University of Utah

Chair of oral examination:

Dr. Laura Parisi, Department of Women’s Studies, UVic

Abstract

Climate capitalism has emerged over the last two decades as the response of a section of the global elite to the crisis of global warming. Greater consciousness of threats to the stability of the global carbon cycle, and thus to the general conditions for capital accumulation, has led certain members of the global elite to design a project of climate capitalism, that holds the promise of a smooth transition out of the crisis and into a new era of accumulation on renewed, ecologically modernized foundations. However, climate capitalism has been contested from the start. For one, many still do not accept that there exists any problem that needs addressing in the first place. At the other end of the spectrum, climate capitalism is challenged on the grounds of its incapacity to reduce GHG emissions and its complicity with neoliberalism in entrenching existing inequality. Debates abound around the latter critique. Should climate capitalism be opposed by all means, or should it be cautiously supported, for want of an alternative that can be realized rapidly enough? The response to this question crucially depends on whether support exists among the corporate and other global elites for a climate capitalism that stands a chance of actually reducing climate impacts in a timely manner. This dissertation directly addresses the issue of the existence and extent of corporate elite support for climate capitalism. It asks specifically, *what forces support climate capitalism, how and to what degree they are organized, and how powerful they are relative to the forces of the status quo.*

This study answers the question of the potential of the climate capitalist project to become entrenched at the core of the neoliberal hegemonic bloc with a qualified yes: although broad support has not yet emerged, it seems poised to develop in the future as the global ecological crisis deepens – perhaps as an outcome of the 2015 Paris Climate Conference. As to the question of the content of climate capitalism, and thereupon the issue of whether climate capitalism can actually provide a reduction in GHG emissions, the study finds that the dominant view of climate capitalism is that of a weak ecological modernization, taking place over the long term. In view of the scientific consensus on the urgency of massive GHG emissions reductions in the near term, this confirms the argument put forth by critics that a realistic response to climate change cannot be founded on climate capitalist principles.

Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships

2015-2016 SSHRC Post-Doctoral Fellowship
2013-2014 Centre for Global Studies Student Fellowship
2007-2011 SSHRC Ph.D. Fellowship
2007 President’s Research Scholarship, UVic
2007 University of Victoria Graduate Award

2002 Berthelet-Aubin Award, Université de Montréal
2002 Department of Anthropology Award, U. de Montréal

Presentations

- Sapinski, J. P. 2014. "Green capitalism and the transnational policy-planning network." Distributed paper, *XVIII ISA World Congress of Sociology*, Yokohama, Japan, July 13-19.
- Sapinski, J. P. 2014. "The climate capitalist corporate elite network." *Annual Meeting of the Society for Socialist Studies*, Brock University, St. Catharines (ON), May 24-30.
- Carroll, W. K. and J. P. Sapinski. 2014. "Transnational alternative policy groups in global civil society: Enablers of post-capitalist alternatives or carriers of NGOization?" *Annual Meeting of the Society for Socialist Studies*, Brock University, St. Catharines (ON), May 24-30.
- Carroll, W. K. and J. P. Sapinski. 2012. "Embedding post-capitalist alternatives: The global network of alternative knowledge production and mobilization." *Embeddedness and Beyond: Do Sociological Theories Meet Reality? International Conference*, Higher School of Economics, Moscow, October 25-28.
- Sapinski, J. P. 2012. "Corporate elite organizations and the legitimization of carbon markets: An analysis of the environmental policy-planning network, 1996-2010." *Second ISA Forum of Sociology*, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 1-4.
- Carroll, W. K. and J. P. Sapinski. 2012. "Embedding post-capitalist alternatives: The global network of alternative knowledge production and mobilization." *Second ISA Forum of Sociology*, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 1-4.
- Sapinski, J. P. 2012. "The global corporate elite and the transnational environmental policy-planning network." *Canadian Sociological Association 2012 Conference*, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo (ON), May 27-June 2.
- Carroll, W. K. and J. P. Sapinski. 2012. "Embedding post-capitalist alternatives: The global network of alternative knowledge production and mobilization." *Crossroads: Critical Theories in an Uncertain World*, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo (ON), May 30-June 2.
- Sapinski, J. P. 2012. "Firms as political actors: The structure of the corporate environmental policy-planning network." *International Conference on Degrowth in the Americas*, Université de Montréal, May 13-19.
- Sapinski, J. P. 2012. "Constructing climate capitalism: The organizational ecology of climate policy-planning groups since 1990." *Global Studies*

Association North American Conference, University of Victoria, May 4-6.

- Sapinski, J. P. 2010. "Capitalist production and the ecological limits to economic growth." *Association for Environmental Studies and Science Conference*, Lewis and Clark College, Portland (OR), June 17-20.
- Sapinski, J. P. 2010. "The earth system, planetary boundaries, and the mechanisms of economic growth." *Environmental Studies Association of Canada Annual Conference*, Concordia University, Montreal, May 31-June 1.
- Brem-Wilson, J., D. Huxtable and J. P. Sapinski. 2009. "Transnational social movements: Coalitions, alliances and global resistance." *Annual Meeting of the Society for Socialist Studies*, Carleton University, Ottawa, May 27-30.
- Sapinski, J. P., J. Brem-Wilson and D. Huxtable 2009. "Mondialisation des mouvements sociaux: Coalitions, alliances et résistance globale." *77^e congrès de l'Acfas* (Association francophone pour le savoir), University of Ottawa, May 11-15.
- Carroll, W. K. and J. P. Sapinski. 2008. "The global corporate elite and the transnational policy-planning network, 1996-2006: A structural analysis." *Annual Meeting of the International Sociological Association*, Barcelona, September 4-8.

Publications

- Carroll, W. K. and J. P. Sapinski. 2014. "Transnational alternative policy groups in global civil society: enablers of post-capitalist alternatives or carriers of NGOization?" Under review.
- Carroll, W. K. and J. P. Sapinski. 2013. "Embedding post-capitalist alternatives: The global network of alternative knowledge production." *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 19(2): Forthcoming.
- Carroll, W. K. and J. P. Sapinski. 2011. "Interorganizational networks and economic elites." Pp. 180-195 in *The Sage Handbook of Social Network Analysis*, J. Scott and P.J. Carrington, eds. London: SAGE publications.
- Carroll, W. K. and J. P. Sapinski. 2010. "Consolidating the Transnational Corporate-Policy Network, 1996-2006." Pp. 179-202 in Carroll, W. K., *The Making of a Transnational Capitalist Class: Corporate Power in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Zed Books.
- Carroll, W. K. and J. P. Sapinski. 2010. "The global corporate elite and the transnational policy-planning network, 1996-2006: A structural analysis." *International Sociology*, 25(4): 501-538.
Re-printed in Carrington, Peter J., ed. 2014. *Applications of Social Network Analysis*, vol. 3. London: Sage Publications, pp. 233-64.