



(Research on Lifestyles, Values and Environment)
UNIVERSITY OF SURREY, Guildford, Surrey GU2 7XH

FORTHCOMING SEMINAR

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45b AZ 04
University of Surrey

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Sustainable Living: working towards attractive alternatives?

Contemporary affluent cultures are, climate scientists tell us, unsustainable. Because 'unsustainable' confirms potentially catastrophic outcomes and there is near consensus around human causation, we feel it imperative to act.

Carbon footprint calculators abound and, based on arguable assumptions, characterise lifestyles in affluent societies as (mostly) unsustainable and (rarely) sustainable. However, it is likely that these sustainable lifestyles would appear deeply unattractive to the majority in 'consumer culture'. Consumer cultures are, as many writers have pointed out, constructed on concepts of choice, identity projects, dynamic change and pleasure seeking. Nevertheless, I would argue, the categorical nature of sustainability requires that we base our conceptualisations of future sustainable lifestyles on currently viable forms rather than the modification of unsustainable forms. Moving *towards* sustainability is unhelpful, even a distraction, unless we in some sense arrive.

One useful question we might ask is how current sustainable lifestyles might be facilitated (rather than marginalised), made more sustainable by *credible* technological advances and given additional low-carbon pleasures that might conceivably appeal to the majority. Such a project would require both scientific calculation and prospective ethnographic description since if the results were to be persuasive they would have to be arguable, trustworthy and 'marketable'. It would need to deliver variety to facilitate identities, address the issue of what a sustainable cultural dynamism and a trade-off of possibilities might look like and offer a choice of attractive consumption pleasures within the remit of sustainability.

That, from my perspective, is the challenge.

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