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ABSTRACT

Market logic encourages the idea everything can be bought and sold, and in effect creates an individualized society. This individualization affects consumption habits, environmental action, and social change. It argues that many green consumer products are not solutions to our environmental crises, but mask the larger institutional problems that have led to environmental degradation and diminished civic participation. Society needs to reframe what it means to be environmentally sustainable. In order to generate lasting sustainable social change, action needs to come from community awareness and participation to influence social forces and structures that impact the environment.

Capitalism's current focus on unlimited growth balanced against the need to preserve the environment and natural resources has reached a critical tipping point with shrinking non-renewable resources and the threat of global climate change. The growth model assumes that the environment has an unlimited amount natural resources and leads to environmental exploitation. Yet, how do we sustain our way of life as well as the environment? In our quest for a sustainable economy, development, and lifestyle current mainstream culture has disregarded a key element in the environmental crisis, consumerism. The belief that our current economic model can solve the issues of climate change is unlikely because this system needs constant growth, and that means increasing consumption. Consumerism not only adds to our environmental crisis because of it use of natural resources and waste but also because of the mentality that it creates, the market logic, that everything is for sale (Brueggemann 2010). This includes not only consumer products but also values, ideals, our communities, and ourselves.

American society's environmental problems consist of more than just environmental degradation and global warming, but also include social issues. In Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed, Jared Diamond points to the fact that no society has collapsed solely due to environmental problems. Other factors such as the specific type of damage caused, climate change, hostile neighbors, decreased support by neighbors, as well as society's response to environmental change shapes the ultimate outcome (Diamond 2005). To understand these issues requires a critical examination of what shapes our society. Social institutions and social forces have produced these issues, in part due to an economic system, whose market logic has grown outside it symbiotic relationship with other institutions. Thus merging into other aspects of social life where it was once kept in balance (Brueggemann 2010). The market logic mentality has created an individualistic outlook and commodified environmentalism, affecting a society's ability to create social and environmental change.

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The problem with attempting to facilitate broader social change that will focus on more sustainable alternatives is that our society has become highly individualized. Modern society has alienated people from not only the environment but also their communities to the point where it creates a "hyper- individualist" society (McKibben 2007). We are increasingly seeing ourselves as separate, from other people and from the environment.

One characteristic of market logic that has spread outside of the economic realm and into other aspects of society is competition. Competition creates narrow views in an attempt to advance one's social position, status, and wealth, "We've gotten so used to the idea that our own individual selves should be the center of our lives that we've taken to calling it "human nature" (Mckibben 2007:30). In the famous words of Michael Douglas in Wall Street, "Greed for the lack of a better word, is good". Consumer culture encourages individuals to feel the need to accumulate more and out-do the neighbors. This idea of competition is fed to us through socialization, advertising, media, and technology encouraging an individualized culture. Competition does not foster a common identity; it puts people against one another, weakening the chances of creating strong social ties and change for a common good.

In Montana's Bitteroot Valley major class divisions separate the residents, the wealthy vacationers and the locals. Both are in competition over land use, whether for recreation or sustaining local ways of life, and fail to focus on the larger issues of environmental and economic sustainability and favor selfish behaviors to advance their own position (Diamond 2005). This competition does not foster a responsible or mutual relationship over resource use; it will always benefit one group over the other. The Bitteroot community experienced animosity within their community thus adding more stress the environment by failing to reach a mutual consensus.

Competition is not the only thing to create an individualized attitude. New personal technologies such as cell phones, social networks, IPods, and tablet computers reshape the way people interact and experience their immediate surroundings. Technology disconnects people, privatizing leisure with television, personal computers, and the internet. There is a clear generational change in the way people are participating in leisure as well as civic engagement in large part due to how "wired in" people are (Putnam 2000). Americans spend hours starring into televisions. In 2009, the average time spent watching television daily was four hours and forty-nine minutes (Freierman 2009). During these many hours of viewing advertisers attempt to convince consumers they need more things. Technology is a tool for distraction. It is so readily available at every moment of the day that we ignore our surroundings and focus more on staying connected in a digital world. This constant exposure to technology, advertising, and media has transformed our purpose as humans into consumers.

Environmentalism refers to conserving and preserving the natural environment and its resources through a sustainable long-term lifestyle. However, particular current marketing trends have blurred the lines between consumer goods and environmentalism. This process

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impacts the way people see the environment, corporations have commodified the idea of environmentalism. It is rational capitalist behavior, turning environmentalism into a profitable marketing scheme. One can buy their way into helping or protecting the environment without having to leave the house. Environmental action becomes consumption based and less as an ideal or value by which to live, contradicting the idea of environmentalism, by promoting consumerism. It is not that green consumer products are ineffectual, in fact they represent critical forward progress but "the individually responsible consumer is encouraged to purchase a vast array of "green" or "eco-friendly" products on the premise that the more such products are purchased and consumed, the healthier the planet's ecological process will become (Maniates 2001, 43)". There needs to be less consumption, not more consumption of eco-friendly products, it acts as a Band-Aid concealing the overall issues of consumption and economic growth. Environmentalism has become consumer based on a large scale, privatizing environmentalism.

By turning environmentalism into a commodity it increases the individualization of society. By focusing on the individual and commodifying environmentalism, consumer based environmental action does not take into account the fact that environmental degradation is a social and political problem. The focus on the environment around the individual, the home, car, and family disregards the issues of the use of natural resources, deforestation, water, and air pollution that are created by the collective society. These problems are less immediately visible and therefore not a central focus of individual action.

The individualizing of society alters the way that society views the environmental crisis. Society frames these problems as personal consuming issues. The focus comes to the responsibility of the individual, "publications such as the "Green Consumer Guide" and "personal Action Guide for the Earth" frequently highlight individual responsibility without considering the broader social pressures (Robottom, Ian, Hart, Paul 1995). By individualizing environmentalism it loses one of the major driving forces in social change, group action. The "individualization of responsibility" conceals the fact that environmental degradation is an institutional issue and limits our ability to pursue productive responses. People are first consumers and then citizens (Maniates 2010). Environmental action has become focused around personal pleasure. Instead of working to change the society, the spotlight turns to consuming, promoting growth within the system that created the problem in the first place. Individualizing environmentalism limits the ability to create larger structural change. Voting with your dollar encourages the notion that change should occur through economic means, detracting from the importance of social ties to the larger community. Slavoj Zizek points out an example of this greening through consumerism with an advertisement from Starbucks, the ad says,

When you buy Starbucks, whether you realize it or not, you're buying into something bigger than a cup of coffee. You're buying into a coffee ethic. Through our Starbucks Shared Planet program, we purchase more Fair Trade

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coffee than any other company in the world, ensuring that the farmers who grow the beans receive a fair price for their hard work (Zizek 2010, 53).

Zizek refers to this as "cultural capitalism", people buy these products to be a part of the experience they provide, "we buy them in order to render our lives pleasurable and meaningful (Zizek 2010, 52). It gives the illusion of caring and global awareness while buying into the status quo of capitalist domination. By attaching more meaning to something as simple as a cup of coffee, such as sustainability and righteous business practices, it creates an illusion that we are not just consumers but environmentalists. The higher meaning of the product replaces meaningful social awareness, action, and change. Buying environmentalism also reinforces socioeconomic statuses adding to class separation and perpetuating individualism while also weakening social cohesion.

As our society becomes highly individualized and separated through the division of labor, technology, and consumption it creates a crisis of the community. In Robert Putnam's Bowling Alone, he discusses the decline of civic life. People are less likely to participate in social clubs, organizations, and even to vote (Putnam 2000). Technology allows people to stay connected but physically distant. Through social network sites such as Facebook and MySpace people may feel as though they are a part of one another's lives and the larger community while in reality people have become more spatially separated (Brueggemann 2010). The average house size has doubled since 1970, while there are fewer people living in each home, on average two people per acre (Mckibben 2007). Urban sprawl has destroyed wetlands and forests, bourgeois ideals have led to manicured lawns and substantially larger homes, and a decentralized infrastructure has contributed to our "Drive-In" culture. With an average of two people per acre, American culture has grown up around the idea of personal transportation to the point where there are not only drive-in theaters and food but also liquor stores and pharmacies. John Brueggemann states that "the individual conscience develops in the context of social groups (2010, 15)". If much of our time is devoted to individual technology and as these become increasingly important in daily lives, people will develop an individualized attitude and close out the outside world.

We are increasingly living in a built world. Much of the population has moved to urban areas and "by 2025 about two thirds will be urban dwellers (Buttel, Humphrey, Lewis 2002, 73)". We are increasingly disconnected from immediate surroundings as well as the natural environment, reinforcing an out of sight out of mind mentality. This mentality has allowed for the justification of locally undesirable land uses that affect minority and low socioeconomic classes and influences "Not In My Back Yard" attitudes. Modern society has built up walls. Market logic has made ourselves the most important thing, and as a result we tend to forget about neighbors and the community.

With the decline of civic life, social groups have less influence on the individual conscience that makes choices regarding consumption and environmentalism. People surround themselves in consumer goods, creating an illusion that the world is fine, ignoring the

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consequences of conspicuous consumption's impact on the environment. This "fetishistic denial" of how consumer goods are produced and where they come from leave individuals alienated from the mode of production and their consequences; people are aware of the damage that they are doing but continue to do it (Zizek 2010, 37). Consumers continue to purchase and practice harmful actions, assuming that technology will be the solution but addressing ecological problems requires more than technology, it involves choices and decisions on how we live our lives. These issues need more than technological solutions but political as well as social (Zizek 2010). Developed nations have to look to their collective conscious and social ties for a sustainably future.

Social capital is a major determinant in levels of community action. Social capital refers to "trustful relationships (vertically between citizens and government and horizontal among citizens) and a civic society characterized by dense organizational networks" and these play a major role in the way that communities deal with conflict (Duit 2011). This trust is formed by citizen participation in civic organizations and local networks (Putnam, Leonardi, Nanetti 1993). Yet strong social capital is fairly limited within our current society. The number of people with zero discussion networks has gone up 14.6 percent, and all respondents showed a significantly smaller number of confidants in 2004 than in 1985 (Mcpherson, Smith-Lovin, Brashears 2006). Weak social capital impacts a society's effectiveness in addressing social problems and limits the pressure applied to key social institutions involved in implementing change. A study by Andreas Duit found that institutional quality affects the levels of participation in voluntary social organizations (2011). As people are increasingly unsatisfied with social institutions such as governmental or economic institutions, the less likely they are to participate in civic organizations. Breuggemann points to the fact that this trend can be described by the invasion of market logic, weakening other social institutions that work to balance society (2010). The weaker the social ties, the less likely communities are able to create social change.

Being a part of the larger society forces people to look past their own individual needs. It focuses on the collective and what each community views as the greater good. What the current social structure does is fragment our everyday lives, as well as increases our mobility. People are less connected to their surroundings, neighborhoods, and communities, which affect the ability to fully participate as citizens of a community (Maniates 2001). There needs to be a change in our social mentality that focuses less on the individual and more on the collective. When people have a closer relation to problems they are more likely to be conscientious of their actions that are link to environmental degradation (Brueggemann 2010). Individuals who feel as though they belong whether to a group or community are more likely to have higher social interest (Curlette & Kern 2010) and overall more invested in the community and the problems it faces. Also, connection to a community will generate a greater interest in long-term viability and builds relationships as opposed to a "one night stand" economy that lacks in accountability for environmental and social justice (PBS NOW 2010). Strong communities are going to want to stay strong, for the benefit of themselves as well as future generations.

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An example of community action working to solve environmental issues comes from John Cronin and Robert Kennedy Jr. in their book The RiverKeepers (1997). The Hudson River was polluted by industrial waste and runoff that threatened ecosystems, wildlife, recreation, and community water sources. To prevent contamination, a community of writers, naturalist, lawyers, students, and residents came together in an effort to save the Hudson River habitat. The group needed citizens to report violations, environmentalist to study the damage, fisherman to bring intimate knowledge of the river, lawyers to prosecute the companies, and students to help with the case. To end the pollution it required an entire community. No individual could possibly do it alone, these issues need countless resources, much more than any one person could have. This communal action has a significantly larger societal impact as opposed to individual consumer habits that only effect personal surroundings. By coming together to solve environmental issues the entire community was ultimately stronger.

The problems that communities face also create social cohesion. Working together as a community creates social capital, linking people together outside their personal bubble. By supporting local communities people are supporting friends, family, and neighbors, opposed to big box corporations based out of state. Charles Heying points out that "corporate delocaliztion" reduces social cohesion and civic leadership, it creates an impersonal market place (Putman 2000). By supporting local economies you support job growth, living wages, and equality through initiatives such as co-ops that focus on social capital and collaborative efforts while also minimizing the impact on the environment (PBS NOW 2010). Communities face the larger societal issues that individuals fail to either acknowledge or feel as though they cannot change. Many of the environmental issues the world faces involves more than addressing just the environment, it has to be looked at from a community standpoint, politically and socially.

The environmental crisis consists of much more than what many people seem to recognize and requires societal changes, not just altering consumption habits. Market logic's role in commodifying environmentalism has led people to believe that environmental issues can be solved with more conspicuous consumption. Also, market logic's stress on individuality has created a hyper individualistic society that fails to recognize the importance of community action in creating social change. Individualization has only added to the stress applied to earth's ecosystems through urban sprawl, increased consumption, and the alienation of people from natural and social environments. By individualizing environmental issues people fail to address the fact that it is the larger institutions that shape our culture that have led to these problems.

The decline of civic life has greatly impeded the progress towards an environmentally sustainable future because the focus on the greater good has turned to the individual. Communities play an integral part in development whether sustainably or socially because they have the power to redirect social action to change existing systems. Our current instrumentally rational thinking tells us that more and bigger is better. It is not just a matter of changing our habits to create sustainable development but changing the system. Reforms only work to shape a system that was unsustainable to begin with. Current structures need to be dismantled

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and rebuilt from their foundations. As a part of the global ecosystem, humans need to take a sharp turn; there need to be radical fundamental changes in the way people think about development, sustainability, and growth. To truly solve the issues of environmental degradation and global warming our entire society needs to reflect on the choices it makes not only economically but socially as well.

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