



**University
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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**“Against the Economic Grain: Moral Exemplars Build Visibility and
Model the Viability of Low-Carbon Livelihoods”**

School of Environmental Studies

Tuesday, February 26, 2019
9:00 A.M.
David Turpin Building
Room A140

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. James Rowe, School of Environmental Studies, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Ana Maria Peredo, School of Environmental Studies, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. James Lawson, Department of Political Science, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Nathan Lachowsky, School of Public Health and Social Policy, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

The manner in which socioeconomic forces direct environmentally unsustainable behaviour is largely unseen and unappreciated. North American cultural beliefs, norms and values reinforce the economic system and constitute significant barriers to large-scale societal ecological behaviour change. Overlooked in the degrowth literature, even by researchers who have examined the importance of socioeconomic barriers, is the role occupation plays in dictating the ecological footprint of our lifestyles and the form of our social identities. We have gained some understanding of the motivation of those individuals who have chosen to pursue a low-carbon lifestyle, but are lacking information about those who go one step further and adopt a low-carbon livelihood. Fifteen individuals who successfully adopted low-carbon livelihoods were interviewed to examine socioeconomic barriers they may have experienced and learn how those challenges were met. To assume a low-carbon livelihood at present is likely to require forming a new social status identity, adopting new metrics for judging oneself, and creating a new social network supportive of that identity and its values.

A four-quadrant framework was used to examine the systemic nature of emergent themes regarding socioeconomic barriers and how those were overcome. Themes that emerged revealed many similarities to individuals committed to a low-carbon lifestyle with some critical differences in terms of both inhibiting and enabling factors. A core finding was that motivational and personality characteristics of the low-carbon livelihood individuals mimic the attributes of moral exemplars that drive a deep sense of ethical obligation to create a pro-social occupation that can function in a low-carbon manner. Clear values, coupled with a strong sense of personal responsibility, overpowered the socioeconomic barriers participants encountered. Implications of the similarities of those with low-carbon livelihoods to moral exemplars for building and fortifying the Degrowth movement are examined.