Programme

The Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
(Department of Sociology)

Jean Philippe Sapinski

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, UVic (Outside member)

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**


**Publications**


