

## **Review: Environmentalism Unbound: Exploring New Pathways for Change**

By Robert Gottlieb

Reviewed by [On-Kwok Lai](#)  
*Kwansei Gakuin University, Japan*

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Robert Gottlieb. *Environmentalism Unbound: Exploring New Pathways for Change*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 2001. 396 pp. ISBN 0-262-07210-6 (cloth). US\$32.95

Interest in the social shaping of the environment and societal response to green ideas has grown considerably not only among scholars but also among environmentalists and policy-makers. This insightful and stimulating book mostly satisfies the growing demand; it has good case illustrations on the synergy, vis-a-vis the decoupling, of the informed social change and environmentalism.

The book is divided into seven chapters: two are discursive and analytical (chapters 1 and 7), two relate to politics/policy on the cleaner production initiatives and the politics of food, respectively (chapters 2 and 6), and three are empirical case studies on the concerted effort for socio-environmental improvements in greener dry cleaning industry, the chemical exposure of janitors, and the restructuring of the insecure food system respectively (chapters 3, 4, and 5).

In the introductory chapter, Gottlieb rightly notes that, in the last three decades of the 20th century, environmental discourse was shaped by different forms of green activism with an assumption of the long-standing separation of the social from the ecological (p. 5) and therefore not productive in terms of the harmonization of the relationship between nature and society. As argued by the author, the divided and fragmented approaches for environmental justice and prevention are fruitless in enhancing environmental quality. In contrast, the possibility for a concerted socio-environmental initiative is explored in the remaining chapters, for example, the emergence of a cleaner production regime that requires a more holistic green approach for industrial development (chapter 2).

The next three detailed informational chapters provide good examples for making the seemingly conflicting interests converge: the search for the community's common, worker participation for environmental change in the Santa Monica area, and food insecurity problems at the community scale. Of all three empirical case studies, I like the study on the small and medium enterprise-based dry cleaning for clothes, because it highlights the

complexity of environmental issues in a community setting where the communicative dynamics and the greening of production are fluidly interacting in production-cum-consumption system. On the other hand, the last two chapters argue for the changing regime of food supply and consumption and the necessity for the remaking of socio-economic and politics system, for their compatibility to sustainable development.

Three positive aspects of this book should be noted. First, the book's line of articulation is clear, precise and succinct. Second, the detailed case studies, as well as their references, are informative with good analysis and insight. Last is the brave attempt for a holistic perspective to conceptualize and to advocate the possible synergy between the social and the ecological. Perhaps it is rightly argued that "Mapping all our [environmental] assets still requires a perspective, a discourse if you will, where the social and the ecological are not just meeting halfway from their separate sphere but have become joined as part of a common exercise and through the construction of a common vision" (p. 286). But the question is still unanswered: how to promote this in a place with global economic forces and conflicting interests?

Two caveats about this work: the first is the author's one-sided (sometimes, excessive) passion that he displays and that lies between the lines of envisioning the synergy between environmentalism and sustaining a good social green praxis. Second, the advocacy for a common vision perhaps has somewhat missed the complexity, socio-economic fragmentation, and differentiation in our globalizing world, which is far beyond the (over-) generalization of the three case studies in this book.

Despite this, the breadth of the issues covered, the related innovative discourse, the new perspectives and action-oriented advocacies of this book clearly achieve the aim of the author's project to foster alternative holistic approaches for socio-ecological sustainability. Hence, this provides a good basis for future relevant policy-making and contributing to a constructive public debate. Overall, this highly readable book provides an alternative discourse with good illustrations for the search for common visions and strategies for change towards sustainable development. Yet, more could be expected from the author's future elaboration.

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On-Kwok Lai <[oklai@ksc.kwansei.ac.jp](mailto:oklai@ksc.kwansei.ac.jp)>, Professor, School of Policy Studies, Kwansei Gakuin University, 2-1 Gakuen, Sanda, Hyogo, 669-1337, Japan.  
TEL: 81-795-65-7665.