

**Review: Eco-Business: A Big-Brand Takeover of Sustainability**  
By Peter Dauvergne and Jane Lister

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Dauvergne, Peter and Lister, Jane. *Eco-Business: A Big-Brand Takeover of Sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013. x+194 pp. ISBN 9780262018760, hardcover, alkaline paper. US \$26.95. ISBN 9780262313056, e-book, US\$ 18.95.

According to Peter Dauvergne & Jane Lister, global environmentalism effectively began in 1970 when "...about 20 million people gathered across the United States for one of the largest organized demonstrations ever held: the first Earth Day" (p. 30)., The rise of what they coin as "corporate environmentalism" burgeoned from 1992, however, in the aftermath of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio (p. 31). These two positions (a genuine environmentalism vs. "corporate environmentalism") are opposed in this book. Simply put, Dauvergne and Lister argue that by the 1990s, multinational corporations realized that environmentalism can be lucrative for them so they embarked onto the eco-train without adopting its fundamental aim to stop the growth and avoid overconsumption: "big brands are now turning to eco-business to re-design and reposition aspects and components of their mainstream brands to capture new sales" (p. 76). The authors of *Eco-Business* note that during the last ten years, most corporations have succeeded in their strategies "to produce more with less" (p. 56).

As aptly demonstrated here, all these environment-friendly efforts are planned, codified, calculated, and marketed at a large scale; even green certifications and Eco-Labeling can be highly profitable for businesses, although the main goals for these corporations remain overall control and the preservation of their public image (p. 105). The corporations targeted here are numerous and diversified, from Walmart and The Home Depot to IBM or IKEA; there is no individual target (p. 104). The authors concentrate on new trends and deconstruct many new marketing strategies promoted by corporations in the name of sustainable development. With the adjunction of interactive technology and newly designed online devices, big corporations can now promote their plans for a sustainable lifestyle through their adapted products and consuming strategies based on sustainable branding and eco-packaging (p. 109). The persistent problem of over-consumption lingers, however, as consumers still consume more while they "congratulate themselves on going green." Now they over-consume with the illusory impression of doing the right thing whenever using the so-called "sustainable" choices and related merchandise (p. 159). All in all, it remains a matter of appearances: "It is about gaining legitimacy and projecting an image of responsibility" (p. 161).

*Eco-Business* makes us realize that corporations are subtly taking the place of ecological movements in order to control leadership on environmental issues, to gain exposure on virtual sites for environmental debates, and pilot mainstream discourses

into what Dauvergne and Lister coin here as “parallel strategies” (p. 144). In other words, we face an interesting battle for control over public opinion. Within this competitive context, many corporations now try to imitate the style (but not the contents) of the discourses usually held by alternative groups; “...many are also adopting language commonly heard within nonprofit organizations...” (p. 145).

Undoubtedly, Peter Dauvergne and Jane Lister’s *Eco-Business A Big-Brand Takeover of Sustainability* is a very important contribution that can be understood by undergraduates, non-experts and even the lay reader at the college level or beyond. This is the kind of concise book that is relevant for public libraries as much as for university libraries whenever individuals are asking for a good title about sustainable development. Rigorously documented and well written, it aptly demonstrates its points with wit and nuance. Scholars in environmental studies and political ecology will certainly appreciate its critical, although balanced perspective and vivid style.

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