

DOUGLAS HOLT ABSTRACT

For twenty-five years, civil society and governments have devoted massive resources toward two strategies—sustainable consumption and sustainable economy—that aim to evolve Western societies toward sustainability. These efforts have so far failed. I argue that theoretically-flawed models are to blame. Problematic ideas of social change have led to huge investments in strategies that can't possibly work regardless of the effort. We desperately need strategy innovation if we are to succeed in accelerating society toward sustainability. My recent work critiques these conventional strategies, points out conceptual problems, and proposes new strategic directions. In this seminar, I will overview these two new strategies, part of a troika of new theory-driven strategies to drive the great transition (the third is a political movement strategy to pass an aggressive carbon tax).

1. SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

The sustainable consumption movement has been premised on the idea that appeals to ethical or values frameworks will shift consumer behavior, and we continue to pin our hopes on this model. Yet social science theories argue that this model is conceptually flawed, empirical research struggles to find this linkage, and we now have ample historical evidence that it doesn't work. We must move on to better theory, leading to better strategies.

I argue that we should focus on restructuring markets rather than reforming consumers—what I call *the cultural transformation of unsustainable markets*. I show that unsustainable consumption is an institutional phenomenon, which gets sedimented into particular markets, and held in place by incumbent profits and consumers' "ideological lock-in." We need to develop market movements, specific to each environmentally-significant category, to attack the institutional sources of unsustainability and build sustainable market institutions in their place.

2. SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

To transition from the BAU economy, the sustainable economy movement champions a return to a pre-modern utopian ideal: reviving organic local community with meaningful work, community provisioning, artisan craft and indigenous culture. This movement has been ongoing for at least 40 years yet has never scaled. Why?

I examine the latest articulation, what I call *sustainable bohemia*. Sustainable bohemia is a robust subculture but it hasn't scaled because its appeal is limited to a social class—the "bourgeois bohemians"—who embrace it as ritualized eco-myth, a feel-good ethical sidebar to business-as-usual rather than a pathway to joining a new economic model. In contrast, the movement has ignored the segment most alienated from BAU and so most likely to actually lead the great transition—"Main Street" workers, who have been devastated by the neoliberal economy. Sustainable bohemia is incoherent to them and so never gets traction—hitting what I call a *cultural chasm*. I argue that sustainable economy strategy must be entirely redrawn to appeal to "Main Street." We need to design new national initiatives that appeal to their interests and ideology.

Biographic Information Douglas Holt is Founder and President of the Cultural Strategy Group (Boulder CO), Professor of Marketing at Southern Denmark University, and Professor of Sociology (courtesy) at Colorado State University. Before he started CSG, Holt was professor of marketing at Oxford (where he held the chair), Harvard Business School, Penn State, and Illinois. Holt is one of marketing's leading scholars in Consumer Culture Theory, focusing on the sociology of consumption. And, in the last decade, Holt has pioneered a new cultural theory of branding—what he calls cultural branding—in two books and many articles. He now consults widely on brand strategy, especially to social enterprises (e.g., Patagonia, Ben & Jerry's, Zipcar, Freelancer's Union, New Belgium, REI). For the past six years, Holt has devoted his research and pro bono work to applying cultural branding to

environmental movements and politics, particularly on climate change. In addition to the seminar papers, Holt is now completing a new strategy for a US political movement to pass an aggressive carbon tax.