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Review: Live Sustainably Now: A Low-Carbon Vision of the Good Life

By Karl Coplan

Reviewed by Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi

Katra, India

Coplan, K., *Live Sustainably Now: A Low-Carbon Vision of the Good Life*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2021. 224 pp. ISBN: 9780231190916, \$22.00.

Karl Coplan's "Live Sustainably Now" is a good book not only for "climate activists" or "climate advocates" but also for global citizens who care about this planet, Earth. The text shares the writer's personal journey of attempting to cut back on carbon emissions, and it starts with a fundamental question: "Who believes that all people have an ethical obligation to reduce their individual carbon footprint to a sustainable level, even if the people around them are not doing so?" (p. 5) and offers actionable and feasible approaches that individuals or communities can take for reducing one's carbon footprint and living a more sustainable lifestyle. The book hypothesizes the concept of a "carbon budget" that can be helpful for individuals, communities, or countries to limit the amount of greenhouse gas emissions they can produce without contributing to further climate change. By staying within this budget, we as responsible citizens, can work towards implementing measures to reduce the impacts of climate change.

While sticking to a carbon budget may seem difficult at the surface level, Coplan's book provides realistic and achievable ways to make a positive impact. However, we should not forget that everyone's resources and circumstances may differ, therefore it is important to select and implement strategies contextually, i.e., which are meaningful and feasible in one's specific environment. The message conveyed is that we can contribute to a more sustainable future if we work collectively and make sustainable choices for reducing carbon footprints. Adopting sustainable choices in significant areas does not mean sacrificing joy or denying oneself pleasures. The primary objective is to lead a fulfilling and satisfying life while consciously decreasing one's carbon footprint.

Coplan suggests practical strategies for implementing energy-saving measures in our day-today lives that can significantly reduce carbon emissions, arguing that "both individual action and collective policy will be needed to address climate change" (p. 25).

He states, “keeping to a 4-ton annual carbon budget (or whatever goal you set) is going to require that you tackle those daily items that add up big at the end of the year - electricity, home, heating, getting to work, and food” (p. 103). Over the past decade, Coplan has voluntarily limited his annual carbon emissions to four tons, which is only 40% of the average American's yearly emissions. He accomplishes this impressive feat through various actions, such as commuting by kayak, using trains for conferences, traveling internationally by sailboat, and installing solar panels at his cabin.

Waste reduction and recycling is not easy. Coplan states, “sticking to a carbon budget requires some dedication and willpower; in this sense, it is more like a weight control diet than a cash budget” (p. 81). Minimizing waste generation and maximizing recycling efforts can significantly reduce carbon emissions. This includes recycling paper, plastic, glass, and metal composting organic waste, and reducing single-use plastics. By adopting a low-carbon lifestyle and making conscious choices to reduce personal emissions, Coplan exemplifies the belief that individuals should take responsibility for minimizing their impact on the environment. While systemic changes are necessary for substantial progress, Coplan's actions highlight the importance of personal accountability and the moral duty we all must contribute to a more sustainable future.

Despite assuming this foundational knowledge, the book acknowledges that even experienced environmentalists might find certain ideas challenging or unconventional. Examples such as a composting toilet or a fossil fuel-free Earth Week in April may push the boundaries of what some readers consider mainstream or acceptable. These ideas may be seen as unconventional or radical, even for seasoned environmental advocates. Karl Coplan's carbon diaries, which are documented month by month with accompanying photos, demonstrate that he does not lead a strict or self-punishing lifestyle. The book showcases that Coplan, like many others, embraces moments of indulgence and celebration. It emphasizes that everyone deserves special occasions or "feast days" without compromising their overall commitment to sustainable living. *Live Sustainably Now* serves as a practical and personal handbook for embracing a low-carbon lifestyle.

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