

# The Sim Who Sold the World. Distorted Environmentalism in *Sims 4: Eco Lifestyle*

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Even though The Sims series has long been seen as an embodiment of neo-liberal ideals, an “ideological tool of late capitalism” (Sicart 2003, 5), and a text mirroring the life in which “commodity consumption is the *raison d’être*” (Dyer-Whiteford and de Peuter 2009), when *Sims 4: Eco Lifestyle* (EA 2020) was first released, it has received a lot of interest from the players declaring to care for the environment (Ilsimsie). Unfortunately, it quickly turned out that the way the game presents environmental issues is unsatisfactory at best. While it reflects, for example, the carbon footprint produced by appliances, and mirrors environment-related politics on a local level, it completely omits the harmful effect of consumerism. Purchasing new furniture and renovating a house might have a positive effect on the environment in the game, while in real life it is almost always an environmental cost rather than a benefit. More importantly, the cost of food and fashion industries is entirely erased from the game. Technological novelties are proposed as the solutions, even if they are completely unrelated to the problems (Huisman 2022), and, interestingly, the pro-environmental characters such as Knox Greenburg are presented in a mocking way that fits the stereotype of an eco-freak present in American media.

The specific distortion of environmental issues present in *Sims 4: Eco Lifestyle* can be compared with what is currently done by right-wing politicians and by industries. By now, the necessity for environmental policies is hard to disregard completely. Therefore, the strategies of limiting its impact for the sake of financial gains include “challeng[ing] the reality, human cause, and seriousness of climate change” (McCright et al. 2016, 186), and undermining the gravity of individual consumer’s choices which affect the environment. In other words, many companies claim to be, at least to some extent, pro-environmental, and strive to engage their customers in environmentally friendly actions. Such strategies resemble the shallow ecology movement (as opposed to deep ecology): performing the less-essential actions while ignoring the need to deal with the causes of the most severe environmental problems (Drengson 1995). The

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shallow actions do not necessarily harm the deep. However, promoting them in the game while completely erasing more important and impactful ones is meant to channel the environmental potential of the public into the spheres that do not cause any financial distress to the producers. Quite the opposite; shallow ecology sells well.

This presentation will compare the discrepancies between the representation of pro-environmental behaviors in the game and actual pro-environmentalism. It will focus on explaining the particular distortions by the specificity of culture, politics, and market of the US, the country built by entrepreneurs, with social policies so lacking that owning expensive objects seems to be a moderately good sign of being able to afford healthcare. Finally, the presentation will propose other design possibilities that would allow *Eco Lifestyle*, or a new environmentally-sound life simulator, stay an entertaining product while not misrepresenting and contorting its topic.

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