

Climate, Community, and Cultures: Oasis Regimes from Leukerbad to Laramie

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As I define it, an "oasis" is a place - whether geographical, virtual, or metaphorical - in which the practice of everyday life is suspended, and new regimens can be experienced and adopted. Classic geographically-grounded examples include yoga retreats, spa cures, or eco-tourism. Whether the goal is acquisition of practices or mindsets conducive to improved personal health or planetary sustainability, a change of place or perspective offers a "time-out" from the usual routines, and can play a critical role in facilitating transformation at both the individual and the cultural levels. An oasis can be a place to hide, resisting the realities rolling out before us as temperatures rise. Or, it can be a refuge, offering a sheltered view of the evolving energyscape (pace Appadurai), from which we can take stock and engage with new challenges. It can also be virtual - a story or film or other aspect of the mediascape that draws us in and offers a vision of a new or different world. Please note that I am not using the term "oasis" in its historical sense, with its accompanying aspects of power and privilege in a specific region of the planet. Reshaping the relationship between people and their carbonaceous lifeworlds entails a shift in habitus; I use the term "oasis regime" to think through how a removal from daily life can catalyze such a metamorphosis. Here, I consider ways that oasis regimes may help engage sustainable strategies for responding to climate change through the promotion of low-carbon lifestyles, with examples drawn from my ethnographic fieldwork in India, the USA, and Switzerland.



Sarah Strauss, MPH, PhD, is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Wyoming. She has been an interdisciplinary fellow at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Munich, Germany (2016-17), and held visiting appointments at Pondicherry University (Tamil Nadu, India, 2012-13) Department of Anthropology; University of Fribourg, Switzerland, Department of Geosciences (2005-6); and the US National Center for Atmospheric Research in Colorado, where she was Project Coordinator for the Societal-Environmental Research and Education Laboratory (2008-9). Strauss has conducted Fulbright and NSF funded ethnographic research in India,

Switzerland, and the United States on topics related to health and the environment. Current research focuses on energy transitions (including biomass, solar, and wind), climate change, and community/cultural transformation. Her books include Cultures of Energy (Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA, 2013; co-edited with Stephanie Rupp and Thomas Love), Positioning Yoga (Berg Publishers, Oxford, 2004) and Weather, Climate, Culture (Berg Publishers, Oxford, 2003; co-edited with Ben Orlove).