Across divergent contexts, globalized urban transformations in the direction of sustainability, low-carbon development and other forms of official ‘greening’ are often read in vocabularies of a neoliberal and ‘post-political’ form of technocratic governance. This talk explores a different analytical route to contemporary urban sustainability politics, one informed by debates in science and technology studies (STS) on the prospects and possibilities of technical democracy in the greening city. The urban politics of sustainability, the talk argues, increasingly turns around socio-technical controversies and should be analyzed and engaged centrally as a (radical) politics of expertise. In this context of shared uncertainty, technical democracy signifies a fragile attempt to collectively search for and help form lasting collaborations among experts and laypeople, taken as heterogeneous partners in the articulation of situated urban socio-ecological concerns. Drawing on examples from the speakers’ own case studies into urban climate politics, planning, and activism in Asia and Europe – including Surat in India, Copenhagen in Denmark, and Hong Kong – the talk points to important potentials as well as tensions in the concept of technical democracy, and suggest possible routes ahead in terms of what will be dubbed an agonistic urban pragmatism suited to asking the questions of learning and institutional reform that urban sustainability demands.

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