

To: Cambridge Climate Lecture Series 2017

Subject: Submitting Questions For Panel Discussion--COP21 to Zero Global Emissions

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Key Questions for 16 March 2017 CCLS Panel Discussion

--What is so “sacred” about what we value in megacities that we cannot consider preferring medium to small sized cities (with populations of 100,000 people, or less) and towns, as the central focus of a carbon neutral future?

--*If there were* a high percentage of people who understood that the “votes” (the “investments” of time, energy, and money) each of us make in our everyday lives can result in countless ways of reaching positive tipping points on many critical challenges at the same time--would our first choice, and top priority, be to focus on making megacities carbon neutral--*and ecologically sustainable*--or would it be “retrofitting” medium to small sized cities (with populations of 100,000 people, or less) and towns, instead of “retrofitting” megacities, that a majority of us preferred to focus on?

--Why are there not more and more people mobilizing around a “convergence of critical challenges” agenda?

(Below) Discussion providing context for the above questions, and other related questions

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## A. Introduction

My name is Stefan Pasti, and I am the founder and resource coordinator for The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative, at [www.cpcsi.org](http://www.cpcsi.org) .

The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative provides research and analysis for critical challenge alerts, and research and support for collaborative problem solving and community education initiatives which seek to maximize citizen participation, and accelerate solution-oriented activity.

I was very happy to learn about the Cambridge Climate Lecture Series (CCLS) 2017. I am especially encouraged that the organizers for the CCLS are seeking questions from concerned citizens around the world (via the hashtag #CCLS17). Since I feel it is appropriate to frame my key questions (and related questions) by including some related information and comments, I have created this document--titled "Questions for CCLS17 Panel Discussion--Diminishing Returns re Megacities?" at platforms it will be posted at. This document can also be accessed by a link I will provide at #CCLS17.

Here at the beginning, I will say I'm very concerned about the wisdom of making megacities a high priority for global warming/climate change mitigation. I just don't see how there can be so much consensus about that....

And I will say that my own perspectives are based on the research, writing, and compiling of resources I have done in the process of creating The Interfaith Peacebuilding and Community Revitalization (IPCR) Initiative (2001-2013), and The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative (2013-present)(at [www.cpcsi.org](http://www.cpcsi.org)). Although I have no traditional credentials, or affiliations, I believe I qualify as a stakeholder... as a citizen who is concerned about decisions which (it seems to me) are threatening the very viability of life on Planet Earth.

My interests include: community organizing, collaborative problem solving, community education, community sustainability, community peacebuilding--and the treasured wisdom of our human heritage (wisdom which has been confirmed again and again as essential to individual well-being and social harmony by the saints, sages, spiritual leaders, and sincere practitioners of all religious, spiritual, and moral traditions).

Ex: If many people can learn to find contentment and quality of life while consuming much less material goods and ecological services, this limiting of desires at the "root" will save much trouble trying to respond to the symptoms (of unrestrained, or unexamined desires) as they materialize worldwide. This is one of the benefits of spiritual teachings which often gets overlooked.

[Note: What I have included here in this document can be described as two comments, one key question, another comment, two related questions, a comment, a second key question, and a third "set" of key questions.]

## B. Diminishing returns for megacities model?

**(Comment #1)** In the two page, ten point CPCS Initiative document [“Unprecedented Challenges Ahead—February 2017”](#) (see point 6), I bring forward the argument (based on early William E. Rees research on “ecological footprint”) that *almost all megacities (cities with populations over 1 million) are running massive “ecological deficits” (“resource consumption and waste discharge...in excess of locally/regionally sustainable natural production and assimilative capacity”)*. I am aware of the Sustainable Cities Initiative, the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, the Compact of Mayors, ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability, UNHabitat, and others--and as far as I can tell very few people from these organizations--and very few people from among the most visible global warming/climate change mitigation organizations--are doubtful about the future of megacities.... But it seems to me that no matter how advanced urban farming gets, there is always going to be complex, energy intensive infrastructure; complex, energy intensive supply chains; complex, energy intensive waste management; complex, energy intensive water treatment; etc associated with megacities--all of which has to be maintained... and, from time to time rebuilt... and all this for habitats which (it seems to me) are the farthest from being a good foundation for carbon neutral economies--and the farthest from being a good foundation for ecologically sustainable habitats--that we have. In addition, because of the sheer size of megacities, a high level of associated transport (for food, material supplies, etc) is “locked in” ... and because of the complexity of megacities, there are also complex food waste issues, complex recycling issues, etc. So...

--now that we are leaving the fossil fuel era [of “cheap” energy... and (hopefully) being much more conscientious about the previously unaccounted for “externalities” that come with the how we live] --and now that we are entering what will (hopefully, eventually) be a carbon neutral era of ecologically sustainable economies

--and further, now that we are entering a time of water shortages, and even ongoing water crises

--it seems like we would be arriving at a point of diminishing returns for the megacities model, as a model for sustainable habitats (if they ever were one).

Is it that we believe there are no alternatives to making megacities a priority focus for global warming/climate change mitigation? (hopefully, a rhetorical question....)

**(Comment #2)** I believe that if the central focus of our global warming/climate change mitigation efforts were medium to small sized cities (with populations of 100,000 or less--which people in megacities could be encouraged to migrate to...) and towns--

a) much of what--traditionally--has been local and sustainable ways of earning a living would be supported to the greatest degree possible

- b) it would be easier for residents to learn how to wisely direct their time, energy, and money towards the creation of carbon neutral local economies
- c) there would be many more opportunities to minimize transportation of people, food, and supplies
- d) water use could be more easily given the careful attention we need to give it
- e) circular economies--in terms of food and material recycling--could much more easily approach sustainability, with zero waste
- f) the application of regional and local renewable power generation would be maximized
- g) appropriate technology could be used to reduce the difficulty of *some* tasks--but where it is practical to use manual labor (*even if we can replace it with mechanization*), *manual labor would be preferred, as a one way, among many, of increasing carbon neutral and ecologically sustainable employment* (i.e. the ways of earning a living which we need more and more of at this critical time)
- h) simplifying and downsizing industrialized areas would be a viable pathway towards the goal of reducing energy demand by 40%-70% in industrialized areas--in around ten years [which is a target suggested by Kevin Andersen (see [Cambridge Climate Lecture Series March 9, 2017](#) at 51:04, leading to the need for "Rapid changes in what **we** do, how **we** do it, and how often **we** do it" at 51:57)]
- i) the infrastructure (energy, housing, manufacturing, food production, health care, communication, waste management, etc) needed for such a reverse of the urbanization trend could be of the "leap frog" kind, making such project development into the fastest track to zero emissions, carbon neutral economies, and ecological sustainable habitats that we could possibly have
- j) in many areas project development could simply be an expansion of local sustainability projects already underway) (Ex:much of what was relevant as a response to "peak oil"--energy descent pathways, permaculture, ecovillages, transition movement, re-localization, etc--is just as relevant in the context of global warming/climate change mitigation....)
  - "The energy invested in a particular thing, during its life from cradle to grave (note: grave can be updated to cradle when we have established circular economies), is called the 'embodied energy' of that object. The amount of embodied energy that an item contains depends on the technology used to create it (the origin of materials inputs, how they were created and transported, etc.), the nature of the production system, and the distance the item travels from inception to purchase."
  - "By supporting items and processes that have lower embodied energy, as well as the companies that produce them, consumers can significantly reduce society's energy use."

[Both quotes are from "State of the World 2004: Special Focus: The Consumer Society" by The WorldwatchInstitute W.W. Norton and Company January, 2004 (p. 36-37)]
- k) by being serious enough about the need for creating habitats which greatly decrease energy demand, the message that we need to curtail population growth, rein in indiscriminant consumption of material goods, and do everything possible to sustain ecologically diverse systems, would be clearer and clearer to more and more people
- l) the process of achieving this would involve everyone, which would be a good thing--because at this critical time we need everyone to be involved

m) and something like this is within our capabilities (as opposed to what would be required to maintain megacities on and on into the future).

[Note: I believe the above list of positive arguments for reversing megacity urbanization--and giving high priority to medium and small cities (with populations of 100,000 people, or less) and towns--could easily be expanded and refined by crowdsourcing and crowdstorming.]

I understand we are now in difficult circumstances, and with the built habitat environments that we have... but are there really enough reasons to “retrofit” megacities for a carbon neutral era when (it seems to me) they are the most energy intensive, and most ecologically unsustainable habitats that humans have ever created....

**Thus--Key Question #1:** Specifically, what is so “sacred” about what we value in megacities that we cannot consider preferring medium to small sized cities (with populations of 100,000 people, or less) and towns, as the central focus of a carbon neutral future?

C. Where can we have the greatest impact--and have it count not just now, but in the long run....

**(Comment #3)** To frame what I am getting at in another way: the previously mentioned two page description of [“Unprecedented Challenges Ahead—February 2017”](#) includes, not as asides, but as real obstacles to achieving the positive tipping points we need to mitigate global warming/climate change--

--cultures of violence, corruption, greed, and overindulgence; global inequities; water scarcity and water crises; continuing exponential population increases; distortions of critical information in mass media; critical information being “crowded out” by trivial information in mass media and social media--and by countless entertainment venues; unchecked, and unaccounted for, social and environmental “externalities” being lost in the complexity of our cultural landscapes; sovereign debt and other unfunded liabilities of governments (which cannot be resolved in a cultural landscape which requires reducing energy demand in industrialized areas by 40%-70%); loss of trust and confidence in the institutions responsible for guiding public discourse--

--and, at the root of it all, a marginalization of the treasured wisdom of religious, spiritual, and moral traditions (Ex: *our inability to believe* that we can find contentment and quality of life while consuming less material goods and ecological services).

**Related question #1a)**—In which kind of cultural landscapes/habitats are we most likely to gain traction (rather than lose traction and confidence) on the above challenges--and especially gain traction on the challenge of reversing the marginalization of the treasured *wisdom* of religious, spiritual, and moral traditions... and thus, what kind of habitats have the best chance of--

- a) being our foundation and support for achieving positive tipping points associated with global warming/climate change
- b) being our foundation and support for preferring peacebuilding which supports and actualizes mutually beneficial understandings, forgiveness, and reconciliation—*and which abstains from violent conflict resolution*—as a way of bringing cycles of violence to an end
- c) being our foundation and support for increasing compassion for our fellow human beings
- d) being our foundation and support for using resources carefully, so that there is surplus available for emergency assistance and
- e) being our foundation and support for ecological sustainability on into the future--

--megacities with more than one million people, and with sometimes over 15 million people

or

--medium to small sized cities (with populations of 100,000 people, or less) and towns?

**Related question #1b)**--Which of the two habitats descriptions above would represent more resilience (and less vulnerabilities) if we only manage to hold warming to 2.5°C or 3°C?

D. Three Key Indicators....(what if most of us were as engaged on these questions, as we should be....)

**(Comment #4)** Recently, I sent (via email) a critical challenges alert to more than 200 people in the field of peacebuilding (including many to chairpersons of master's degree programs in graduate schools), and chaplains in offices of religious and spiritual life, at universities and colleges ([“Convergence of Critical Challenges Alert to Peacebuilders, Chaplains—from cpcsi.org”](#)). In that letter, I proposed that there are three key indicators which we can use to measure if we are On Track with the cultural transformation necessary to resolve the challenges of our times--

(the three key indicators)

1) Now... only a small percentage of people understand the following insight, *and are able to apply it in the everyday circumstances of the communities they live in.*

The investments of time, energy, and money (the “votes”) each of us make in our everyday circumstances--

--can result in countless ways of earning a living which *contribute to--rather than impair--*

--the peacebuilding, community revitalization, and ecological sustainability efforts necessary to reach positive tipping points on many critical challenges at the same time.

We need a high percentage of people who understand this insight--*and are able to apply it in the everyday circumstances of the communities they live in.*

2) We need to be on the same side, helping each other.

3) We need to be making best use of the knowledge and skills each one of us has.

And thus a **second Key Question (#2):** *If there were* a high percentage of people who understood that the “votes” each of us make in our everyday lives can result in countless ways of reaching positive tipping points on many critical challenges at the same time--

--would our first choice, and top priority, be to focus on making megacities carbon neutral--*and ecologically sustainable*--or would it be “retrofitting” medium to small sized cities (with populations of 100,000 people, or less) and towns, instead of “retrofitting” megacities, that a majority of us preferred to focus on?

I believe the stakes are so high at this critical time that **we should know what the answer would be to Key Question #2...** and we could know... We could have Community Visioning Initiatives, Neighborhood Learning Centers, and Neighbor to Neighbor Community Education projects in local newspapers (a detailed overview of these collaborative problem solving and community education processes can be found on p. 39-45 of the [CPCS Initiative Summary Paper](#))... and we--collectively--could have the awareness of the consequences of our actions necessary to decide differently in different parts of the world on this second key question (and on all four questions brought forward in this letter), if we choose. And yet... so many of us remain unengaged in the process... at this critical time....

E. Why are there not more and more people mobilizing around a “convergence of critical challenges” agenda....?

So... in addition (*but not to detract, and possibly cause the above questions to be by-passed*), I would like to also ask (**Key Question #3--framed as a “set” of questions**)...

Given the closing window of opportunity for holding global warming below 2°C--*and the unprecedented nature of the culture change necessary to respond in a responsible manner to this challenge (no matter what paths we decide on)*--

- a) why are there not more and more people mobilizing around a “convergence of critical challenges” agenda, instead of a “single issue” focus on global warming
- b) why are there not more and more people being straightforward about how much of lifestyle choices, levels of material consumption, ways of earning a living, etc (*particularly for those of us who have much more than we really need*) need to be “on the table” (it seems to me that everything needs to be “on the table”) and
- c) why are there not more and more people who are trying to engage *everyone--all of us--*(which could be easier done with a “convergence of critical challenges” agenda) to be *thinking very clearly about where we are going at this very critical time*. We are all stakeholders... and regardless of whether we understand climate science or not, we can--by the investments of time, energy, and money (the “votes”) each of us make in our everyday circumstances--contribute much to reaching positive tipping points on many critical challenges, at the same time. *Why--at one of the most critical crossroads in the evolution of life on Planet Earth--are we not all actively involved?*

#### G. Closing Comments

I very much appreciate that the Cambridge Climate Lecture Series (#CCLS17) has provided an opportunity for concerned citizens from around the world to offer questions and comments.

*During the three to eight decades of unprecedented cultural transformation needed to achieve--and adjust to--carbon neutral economies* some, or many, of the observations and beliefs I have shared in this document may turn out to be inaccurate, or may be greatly modified by innovations and changing circumstances which I did not foresee. Unprecedented cultural transformation being carried out in the most complex cultural landscapes ever created, and involving 7.377 billion people, will probably be more of an organic process, rather than something which can be mapped out in well-defined steps. However, of this I am certain: if all universities and colleges had a similar lecture series (with a focus on the unprecedented nature of the *convergence of critical challenges* we now face)--and offered similar opportunities for questions and comments--the accumulated awareness from so many critical information sharing events would greatly accelerate our collective efforts towards holding global warming below 2°C.

For a Peaceful and Sustainable Future,

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