

An Invitation to Participate in Community Visioning Initiatives as a way of carefully examining our options at this critical time

by Stefan Pasti--Resource Coordinator
The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative
www.cpcsc.info stefanpasti@gmx.com

Introduction

Soon we will be moving into a time of unprecedented change, as there are many social and environmental “externalities” (challenges not adequately accounted for in most economic forecasts and investment prospectuses) which are going to require more and more of our attention. In this time of unprecedented change, local newspapers can provide many valuable community services.

There are two kinds of articles in particular which local newspapers could bring on, or do more of, which would represent a new and improved social contract with their readers, and provide many valuable community services:

- 1) articles about “seed” ideas, which may be most helpful to the local communities they would benefit, but which need people support and financial support to realize their potential
- 2) articles about existing initiatives which are directly related to resolving some of the complex critical challenges of our times—so that residents can learn more about how they can make best use of their time, energy, and financial support

In this hybrid article (part personal journey, part risk assessment alert, and part advocacy piece), I will share some “seed” ideas which could exponentially accelerate solution-oriented activity in local communities. The primary focus of this article is on the potential of Community Visioning Initiatives (or other similar stakeholder engagement/collaborative problem solving processes which seek to maximize citizen participation) to help us examine our options very carefully at this critical time.

What I Saw in One 13 Minute Documentary

As a result of watching one 13 minute video documentary, I have been able to see that there are many ways to create positive multiplier effects by applying the collaborative problem solving potential of Community Visioning Initiatives. It seemed easy for me to imagine those possibilities--because what I saw in that video was more than just the actual practices which facilitated citizen participation in brainstorming ideas and solutions for their city. What I saw was a way of revitalizing the sense of working together with our neighbors for the greater good, so that there would be an electrifying feeling about what going to happen next—a collective revitalization of the belief that many good things would be happening in the community, and that many people who lived in the same community would have a part in it.

I saw that video documentary in 1994. However, I have not yet participated in a single Community Visioning Initiative. There were some things missing in that model, and many other similar models...

It seemed to me that--

- 1) rather than asking what kind of city residents wanted to see in the years ahead, the real potential to explore was in using the visioning process as a collaborative problem solving strategy for resolving

critical challenges. (Unfortunately, much of the evidence needed to help people see the urgency of resolving multiple critical challenges has, up to this point in time, not been “coming through the mist as much as it should be”.)

2) to make use of such a collaborative problem solving process to maximize citizen participation in resolving critical challenges, there would need to be many supporting pieces—such as well thought out preliminary surveys sent to 150 key leaders in the community; neighborhood learning centers providing resources and workshops, and facilitating local learning networks; etc. (Note: It has taken me some time to discover, and develop, such key supplementary pieces.)

Where the Sense of Urgency Comes In

I have now given much attention over many years to critical challenge assessment—and I have accumulated information on organizations and initiatives which have created and established effective responses to some of the challenges I’ve identified. It’s true, I don’t have professional credentials. And I’m not affiliated with any businesses, organizations or educational institutions. But I believe it’s fair to say I have a “trained eye”, and a well seasoned intuitive “feel”, for analyzing complex information regarding the most critical challenges of our times, identifying pathways for solution-oriented activity to flow, synthesizing such information into understandable parts, and organizing those parts into a well organized document (much like the work which would need to be done to sort through participant input during a Community Visioning Initiative). (Note: Readers are welcome to access any and all of the documents at the website cited below, and see for themselves if they agree that there are contributions I can make along these lines.) And what I see in the evidence relating to critical challenges is that we are at a critical point in the evolution of life on Planet Earth. I’m not saying this as a gimmick to get readers attention. This is what responsible people need to say, when they’ve seen such evidence.

My latest blog entry at the Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative I’m building (at www.cpcsc.info) is titled “Planetary Distress Signal: Many Danger Signs Flashing Red”—and it provides excerpts from the “Long Version Table of Contents” for a key document titled “Invitation Package for Possible Board of Advisors (at www.cpcsc.info)” (589 pages; 3.65MB; November, 2013). And one of the excerpts is a 28 point timetable of warnings about Global Warming (citing articles, etc from 1988 to 2013). It’s a complex subject, Global Warming. But when you see the evidence laid out like I have, as a compilation of excerpts—and that “Planetary Distress Signal” piece includes a good example of that format/style—you can see that there are a significant number of trajectories which are continuing to move in a dangerous direction. So I’m going to encourage readers to glance through both the “Planetary Distress Signal” piece (7 pages), and the “Long Version Table of Contents” (27 pages). Both are accessible (along with many other supporting documents) at the “Invitation Package” section of the CPCS Initiative website (<http://cpcsc.info/invitation-package/>).

To see where the sense of urgency comes from in a “big picture” context, here is a section from the short Table of Contents (of the “Invitation Package” document):

IV. Critical Challenges of Our Times

A. Monetary Debt

B. Population, Indiscriminant Consumption, and Resource Depletion—Exponentially Increasing World Population at a time when it is culturally acceptable to encourage indiscriminant consumption (with a special focus on Resource Depletion)

C. More about a time when it is culturally acceptable to encourage indiscriminant consumption (with a special focus on the advertising industry’s and the entertainment industry’s part in what is culturally acceptable)

D. The Threat of Global Warming—and the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

- V. Marginalization of the Treasured Wisdom of Religious, Spiritual, and Moral Traditions
- VI. Large Cities (with a Population of 1 million or more) vs. Villages, Towns, and Small Cities

What I believe is most important about the above outline—and readers can see for themselves if they look through the “Long Version Table of Contents” document—is that saints, sages, spiritual leaders, and sincere practitioners of all religious, spiritual, and moral traditions have (for centuries) demonstrated that it is possible for people to achieve highly advanced forms of wisdom and compassion. And such wisdom and compassion makes it possible for people to 1) sacrifice personal desires for the greater good of the whole and 2) find contentment and quality of life while consuming less material goods and ecological services. But when such traditions are marginalized, so are the wisdom and compassion which representatives of those traditions could have transmitted.

And now...it is considered common cultural behavior to participate in a frenzy of indiscriminant consumption. And the result: there are many downside consequences (what some people call social and environmental “externalities”)... such as trillions of dollars in monetary debt (\$40 trillion of sovereign debt, according to an article titled “Sovereign Environmental Debt” by Achim Steiner of the UNEP); an exponentially increasing population which currently requires way too much energy produced by carbon intensive processes, and way too many other carbon intensive goods and services; rapidly accelerating aquifer depletion [(“Half the world’s people live in countries where water tables are falling as aquifers are being depleted. And since 70 percent of world water use is for irrigation...” (Lester R. Brown, Earth Policy Institute)]; and global warming— with a significant number of trajectories that continue to move in a dangerous direction (including carbon emissions caused by transportation and deforestation), and a significant number of disastrous results: ocean habitat destruction, extreme weather events, increasingly complex disaster relief challenges, food production instability, the threat of widespread species extinction, etc. And yet... many people are convinced beyond any shadow of a doubt that what is needed is more indiscriminant consumption—because how else can there be the revenues to meet monetary debt obligations? We really need to think a little more carefully about these issues. Because it seems to me that our levels of indiscriminant material consumption are making what challenges we have more and more complex [especially with all the carbon intensive supply chains and carbon intensive waste disposal chains associated with megacities (cities with populations over 1 million)]...when what we really need instead are more villages, towns, and small cities (which have much more potential to become ecologically sustainable, carbon neutral, and zero waste habitats). (Note: [“A List of Ten Critical Challenges”](#) is a one page critical challenge assessment I have made, which includes supplementary evidence from other longer compilations of evidence.)

A Way of Examining Our Options Very Carefully

Here is what I advocate for as a way of thinking more carefully about these issues:

If communities of people were to recognize the collaborative problem solving and citizen peacebuilding potential of Preliminary Surveys, Community Visioning Initiatives, Community Teaching and Learning Centers, and other elements of the “Constellations of Initiatives” approach detailed in the “Invitation Package” mentioned above,

then while different communities of people would respond differently to what they perceive are the challenges of our times—such responses would at least represent a most thorough and comprehensive exploration of the critical issues of our times. In other words, it would be because we—meaning a significant majority of people who will be affected by the results—chose to do this or that after we examined our options very carefully.

That's what Community Visioning Initiatives can offer us at this critical point in the evolution of life on Planet Earth. A way of examining our options very carefully. Widespread awareness that we are at a critical point in the evolution of life on Planet Earth has been slow in coming, because the evidence is not quite "coming through the mist as much as it should be." But there is more than enough evidence. And the evidence will "come through the mist". Will we be prepared?

Gaining more of an appreciation for the potential of this "constellation of initiatives" approach

The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative advocates for a combination of preliminary surveys, Community Visioning Initiatives, Community Teaching and Learning Centers, "sister community" relationships, job fairs, local currencies, and related community service from local newspapers as a starting point for accelerating solution-oriented activity, and creating more "close-knit" communities...communities with a healthy appreciation for each others strengths, communities with a well-developed capacity to resolve even the most difficult challenges—and communities which demonstrate a high level of compassion for their fellow human beings.

The kind of Community Visioning Initiatives the CPCS Initiative advocates for can be described as a series of community meetings designed to facilitate the process of brainstorming ideas, organizing the ideas into goals, prioritizing the goals, and identifying doable steps towards those goals. But rather than provide more detail about this "constellation of initiatives" approach in an article of this nature, I would prefer to refer readers to supplementary documents and resources. Thus, here are 4 writings of mine which are the result of working with the potential of Community Visioning Initiatives in mind for many years. These documents are accessible at the "Invitation Package" webpage (<http://cpcsc.info/invitation-package/>), and I believe they can be a helpful starting point for discussions about what approaches to collaborative problem solving specific communities of people might prefer.

- 1) "The Potential of Community Visioning Initiatives (in 500 words)"
- 2) "A 15 Step Outline for a Community Visioning Initiatives" (28 pages)
- 3) "15 Sample Preliminary Survey Questions (in preparation for Community Visioning Initiatives)" (12 p.)
- 4) "The Potential of Community Teaching and Learning Centers (in 500 words)"

(Note: There is also a 78 page section in the "Invitation Package" document titled "A Constellation of Initiatives Approach to Collaborative Problem Solving and Citizen Peacebuilding"]

Here I will also provide the details about the video documentary which instantly transmitted to me a deep appreciation for the potential of Community Visioning Initiatives. The title of the video documentary is "Chattanooga: A Community with a Vision" (13 minutes)(accessible at <http://vimeo.com/9653090> and <http://cpcsc.info/invitation-package/>). The video documents two very successful Community Visioning Initiatives organized by the non-profit organization Chattanooga Venture (Chattanooga, Tennessee USA)—one in 1984, and a follow-up in 1993. The 1984 Chattanooga Community Visioning Project ("Vision 2000"), attracted more than 1,700 participants, and produced 40 community goals—which resulted in the implementation of 223 projects and programs, the creation of 1,300 permanent jobs, and a total financial investment of 793 million dollars.

What if many communities of people gain more of an appreciation for the potential of some kind of "constellation of initiatives" approach to collaborative problem solving?

It is just this kind of widespread appreciation for the potential of a "constellation of initiatives" approach to collaborative problem solving that the "Invitation Package for Possible Board of Advisors (at

www.cpcsc.info)” has been written and compiled to encourage. So here I will refer to the hoped for outcomes of that document, which are described on its title page:

“This ‘Invitation Package’ document is a compilation of observations from a wide range of vantage points, which provides both a “big picture” assessment of the critical point we are at, and more than enough evidence that we have the resources to overcome the challenges of our times. Never before in the history of life on planet Earth has there been so many opportunities for redemption.

“This 589 page document is an invitation to the 272 people listed in Section III ‘List of People Being Formally Invited to Join CPCS Initiative Board of Advisors’—and to citizens from every variety of circumstances who might read this—

to help create, become involved, contribute to, and participate in

a) one or more of the thousands of Community Visioning Initiatives (or some similar stakeholder engagement/collaborative problem solving process designed to maximize citizen participation) needed to exponentially accelerate solution-oriented activity at this critical time

b) clearinghouse websites for both Community Visioning Initiatives (or community wide collaborative problem solving/stakeholder engagement processes) and Community Teaching and Learning Centers (Neighborhood Learning Centers).

and to

c) find what inspiration you can from the ‘Invitation Package’ resource, and use it to make a positive contribution somewhere. No association of societies ever on planet Earth has had to resolve the kind of challenges the next few generations of people will have to resolve. We are going to need all the resources, knowledge, and skills each one of us has, and we are going to need to make the best efforts we can at working together, if we are going to succeed at resolving the challenges ahead of us. If there are readers who have not yet been invited to become a part of the unprecedented effort that is needed, such readers are in every way encouraged to consider this document as their invitation.

“We have the resources to overcome the challenges of our times.

“Many hands make much work light.”

We can do it....

Creating the knowledge base and skill sets necessary to resolve the challenges of our times will require encouraging as many formal and informal meetings as possible between neighbors—and people living in the same local community. Creating many Community Teaching and Learning Centers (Neighborhood Learning Centers) can provide places (in local neighborhoods) for discussion, information sharing, mutual support and encouragement, fellowship and friendship—so that the exchanging of information and resources will also include the building of a “close-knit” community of people (who now have many new opportunities to help and support each other towards common goals).

The “constellation of initiatives” approach to collaborative problem solving and citizen peacebuilding advocated for by the Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative creates affordable education systems with numerous associated local learning networks; assists with outreach, partnership formation, project development, and service capacity for both existing (and forming) organizations and businesses; and will inevitably create increasing numbers of solution-oriented and sustainable jobs.

This “constellation of initiatives” approach emphasizes personal and civic responsibility; maximizing citizen participation in identifying challenges and solution-oriented activity; giving people an opportunity to become actively involved in a solution-charged environment; and minimizing the risk of “transformation unemployment”; and is especially appropriate to the building of “close-knit” communities of people... communities with a healthy appreciation for each others strengths, communities with a well-developed capacity to resolve even the most difficult challenges—and communities which demonstrate a high level of compassion for their fellow human beings.

The challenges of our times are not something the experts will resolve while the rest of us are doing something else.

Everyone is involved when it comes to determining the markets which supply the “ways of earning a living”.

The ways we “invest” our time, energy, and money have a direct impact on the “ways of earning a living” that are available.

The investments of time, energy, and money that each of us make in our everyday circumstances becomes the larger economy.

A rough estimate by this writer for a time-intensive (year or more) Community Visioning Initiative (introduced by Preliminary Surveys, and supported by many Community Teaching and Learning Centers) is \$10 million (10 million in U.S. dollars).

Thus, 1000 Community Visioning Initiatives, in communities around the world, would cost \$10 billion. Here are some selected observations (source references in the “Invitation Package” document) to illustrate that we have the resources to carry out 1000 Community Visioning Initiatives:

- 1) \$10 billion is only .005% of the \$207 trillion in personal wealth held by the richest 10 percent.
- 2) \$10 billion is only .57% (a little more than half of 1%) of \$1,750 billion in military expenditures in 2012.
- 3) \$10 billion is 1.8% of (est.) \$557 billion in worldwide advertising spending in 2012.
- 4) Many hands make much work light. (We can do it ourselves.)

Concluding Comments

One of the most persistent ironies in life is that with so many opportunities to provide real assistance to fellow human beings—and with the potential for such assistance to result in happiness “to those who extend help as well as to those who receive it”—there are still many, many people in this world who cannot find a “way to earn a living” providing such assistance. We have the resources necessary to remedy this irony. Will we choose to do so—at this critical point in the evolution of life on planet Earth?

Such are the opportunities accessible to the people alive at this critical point in the evolution of life on Planet Earth. Such is the invitation that this writer has to offer to readers of this message.