

Climate change?

Written by Vittorio Bollo
Tuesday, 16 April 2013 00:00



What if climate change were a hoax? I thought it would be interesting, for this my final column for this fine magazine, to open with this rather controversial question. And I know it may take some regular readers of this magazine by surprise given that it comes from yours truly! After all, there has rarely been an article that I have written for SHEQ Management that has not in some way embedded the issue of climate change, from my articles on peak oil to environmental education, to traffic, to even a night at the movies. Yet I think the question is worth posing! What if this entire palaver and all this fierce debate about global warming and climate change all comes to nought?

Allow me for once to consider the naysayers and climate change sceptics. Heaven knows there are still so many of these naysayers – bless them. Perhaps they have a point; perhaps all of this really is one gigantic conspiracy theory concocted by vegan green activists who don't have enough animal amino acids in them and wear too much hemp, myself included (although I don't wear hemp and heaven knows I cannot do without prawns in my life).

Perhaps all the scientists at the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and countless other research bodies around the world, have fudged or misread the facts, or simply got swept up along in this gigantic, bleak wave that is climate change. Their egotistical quest for academic glory and having the ear of jittery governments and panicky citizens, may simply have got the better of them, right?

What if there is little or no change to the world's climate in fifty or a hundred years from now? To which I blithely respond: so what? Consider the following:

The planet is now a person

In law there is a legal construct that is the "juristic person," i.e. an artificial entity such as a corporation or a government entity that has "personhood" in law, very much like a natural person like you and I. There have been other environmental issues over the years that have chased the limelight and brought green issues to light, from the ozone layer to saving

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whales or saving the rainforests. Yet none has come close to climate change in being able to explode the state of our planet into the collective human conscience.

When have environment and environmental issues been so discussed, and so in the news, as they are now with the advent of the climate change crisis? A so-called crisis or not, climate change has given planet earth personhood. And given the amount of apathy that there has always been towards our living earth, this is in itself no mean feat.

Efficiency, efficiency, efficiency â€” and into the 21st century we go

Efficiency, and particularly energy efficiency, continues to be one of the driving green issues in todayâ€™s world, particularly for business and industry. Carbon footprinting, carbon management and carbon trading are the corporate worldâ€™s buzzwords. I detest how carbon trading and that surreal joke called the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) are given so much credibility and how bankers and derivatives traders have hijacked solutions on climate change just to make a quick buck.

But there is no denying that the world is far more carbon-savvy today and that fossil fuels are the bogeymen of our times. And rightfully so: after all, fossil fuels do untold damage to the environment in their extraction and transportation, never mind the air pollution and myriad of environmental issues they cause when processed or burned. The climate change debate has named and shamed fossil fuels for what they are â€” energy relics of the past, using mostly 19th century technology, that are a curse to this planet â€” and not a moment too soon. We are in 2013 after all, correct?

Cleaner alternatives, cleaner planet

With strides in energy efficiency have come far more investment and even belief in a fossil fuel-free world â€” or at least one which gives us alternatives to dirty energy. Whether it be energy from solar; wind; wave; geothermal; biomass; nano-biotechnology; or even space energy harnessed from the sun â€” it is the clamouring for cleaner alternatives, due to the potential threat of climate change that has spearheaded and vitalised this revolution in cleaner energy. Whether or not climate change comes to pass as forcefully as scientists predict, a world using cleaner energy will be good for all of us, our health and the planet. It is as simple as that.

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Smarter people, smarter planet

Dealing with the possibilities of climate change mitigation or even adaptation has made governments, corporations and communities around the world think differently about the way things are made, the way in which we transport ourselves and all our goods, the way in which we live, the way in which we harvest energy, the way in which we basically do everything. In fact, I would venture to say that the threat of climate change has made us reconsider who we are as homo sapiens and what our collective role has been and should be on this little planet.

It has become part of our collective zeitgeist. Having to think about things differently, being forced to ask questions and offer solutions which generations past did not even have to consider, has defined us and continues to define us. All of this makes humans more dynamic, more introspective while embracing the totality of the living world and, thus, it must make us smarter going forward. Greener buildings, smarter cars and, cleaner air – How can this be a bad thing?

Sustainability is sustainable

Huh? Is that not a nonsensical leading statement? Grammatically speaking, perhaps, but theoretically I believe it to be true. One could argue that it is self-evident: I practise sustainability, therefore I am sustainable. Very obvious and hardly the stuff of Descartes, I know. But it goes deeper than that: by adhering to principles of sustainability, being sustainable becomes not only a means to an end, but the only way forward. Sustainability self-perpetuates by being the only conceivable means by which we will survive on this planet and, therefore, becomes normative.

We’re not there yet – you just have to look at our ongoing heroin-like addiction to oil (in itself a ludicrously unsustainable source of energy) to know that we are very far from being sustainable in any meaningful manner. But we are closer than we were a generation or two ago. And at least sustainability issues are being discussed and solutions are being provided, here and there. And what other issue has fired the drive for sustainability more than the thought of future generations (and perhaps even us) being devastated by the effects of climate change?

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So what if it all turns out to have been hype and much ado about nothing? Does it really matter? Seriously, I mean that “ does it matter in the end? I know I am a believer, because I trust the science, but so what if the science is wrong or overstated and climate change does not wreak its havoc. Is that a gigantic cop-out on my part? Not at all; it’s simply stating what I have believed all along: even if (in the absolute worst case scenario, please note) climate change does not come to pass with all the predicted ferocity and destruction, the change that this controversial issue has forced upon humanity “ and that has been the defining global issue of our times “ will have been worth it. One could argue that the planet demanded no less.

In my final closing, these words by the French philosopher Voltaire beautifully sum up how I feel about this entire climate change “debate”, not to mention all things environmental: “Men argue. Nature acts.” Enough said.

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