

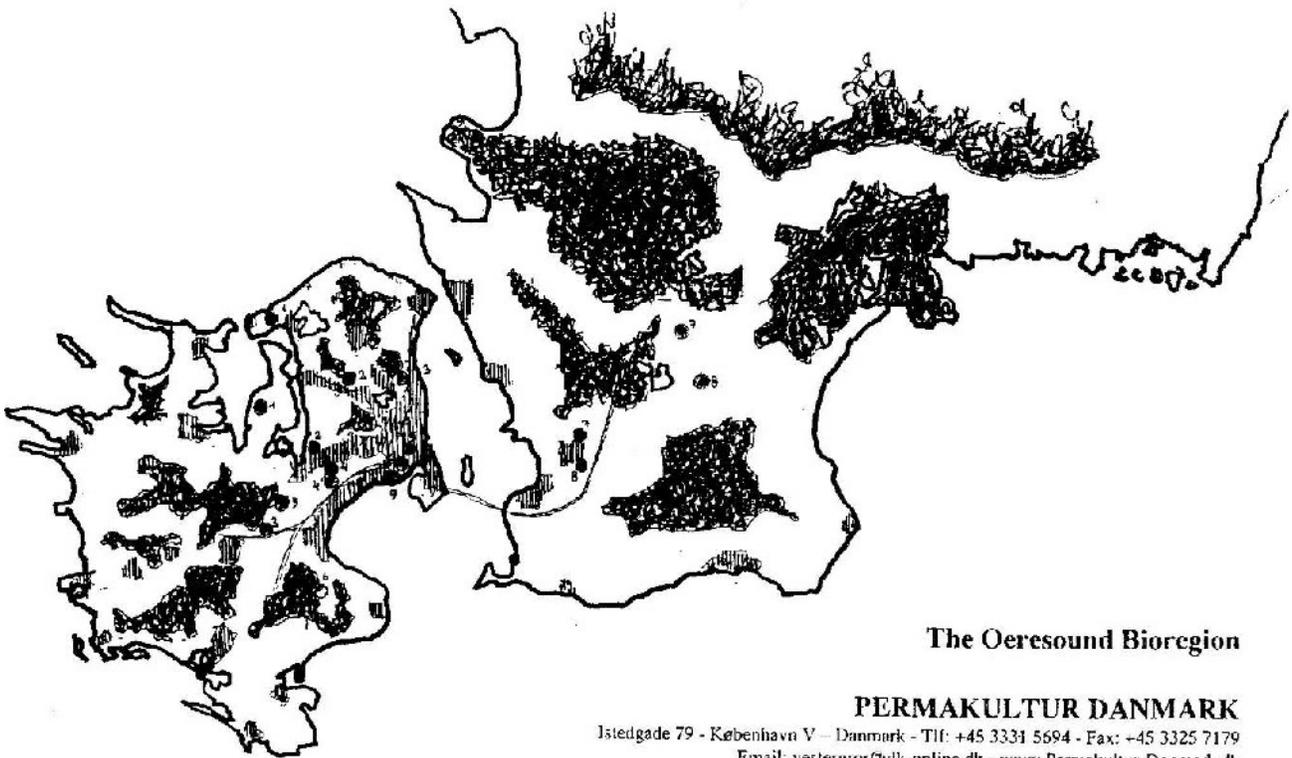
Plan B

An approach for a strategy to cope with the coming breakdowns in the natural ecological systems

On a meeting of the Scandinavian Permaculture teachers did we realize that our current strategy, to establish small beautiful and well working Permaculture projects might need some reconsideration. Our small projects only seem to work as inspiration for small groups of people already tuned in to our way of thinking, while society at large has continued unaffected – regarding us with some patronizing curiosity and arrogant tolerance.

In this process do we have to realize that the global situation has developed into the nightmare we predicted in the 60's and 70's – with all the disasters we foresaw then.

Therefore do we have to redevelop our strategy from the beautiful Plan A, where we hoped to convince the world to behave, to a Plan B, where the world doesn't behave, but have to act in a situation of constant crashes and ever changing natural disasters.



The Oeresound Bioregion

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Foreword

During the last few years, there has been a discussion among permaculturists about 'Peak Oil' and 'Energy Descent'. This discussion has been going on for many years already among geologists and environmentalists, but it has only recently been taken up more intensively among permaculturists, and presented as something to be included in our central understandings.

'Peak Oil' concerns the idea that we have reached a maximum of oil production, globally. And that from now on, the production of oil (and gas) will not be able to follow with the ever increasing demands for energy, globally. On this background, it is predicted that we are about to experience an 'Energy Descent', already beginning to happen. This means that the global energy supply is going to diminish and create a situation where there will be shortage of energy in most parts of the world, with all this may mean for a world economy dependent on unlimited energy supplies. In other words, 'Peak Oil' and 'Energy Descent' are the predictions of a very serious energy crisis, soon to come, affecting the whole world.

There is, however, quite many signs that indicate that this 'disaster prophecy' will not come true. The ongoing developments in energy technology may well postpone the energy crisis for several decades. And then, we have also been asking ourselves; why does this strong wish occur now, to focus on one singular issue like the oil/energy situation?

In our understanding, permaculture is a multiple, not a singular approach. And in our understanding, permaculture is designed to provide answers to the worrying environmental situation as a whole, not just to focus on one singular aspect like the oil/energy supply. This consideration also points to another aspect within the whole Peak Oil / Energy Descent discussion: That maybe it is really an expression of wishing to modify permaculture into something that can appeal to the 'mainstream' of culture, politics and media, seeing that our original approaches mostly brought us marginalisation. (And from this follows then a further discussion about whether this is unavoidable, due to the basic concepts of permaculture, and how they can only collide with modern culture and modern world views).

Peak Oil and Energy Descent gained broad exposure at the International Permaculture Convergence IPC7 in Croatia 2005, and it became a theme in the Permaculture Activist, issue no. 59, Spring 2006; as well as in two articles of the Permaculture Magazine, issue no. 47, also Spring 2006.

On this background, with our increasing concern about the implications of the way of these discussions, Peak Oil and Energy Descent became a theme for discussion also at the Scandinavian Permaculture Teachers' Seminar in Sweden, March 2006. And we decided after the seminar to put our thoughts into an article, which we sent to both the Activist and the Magazine.

The content of this article, and the correspondence it generated, is what the following pages contain.

June 2006.

Fra: Poul Erik Pedersen
Sendt: 24. marts 2006 12:43
Til: Maddy Harland (PC Mgz); peter bane
Cc: 'Chris Druid'; 'Dan Frendin'; 'Henning Hervik'; 'Peter Norrthon'; 'Tony Andersen'; 'Per Rune Hollup'
Emne: Proposal for article for the Activist / the Magazine - 'Plan B'

Dear Maddy, Dear Peter!

Here in Scandinavia, we have been following the international PC-debate on Oil Peak and Energy Descent with interest. Especially through the articles in the last issues of the Magazine and the Activist.

It has become an issue for extensive discussions in our scandinavian forums, and we have decided to write and send you the attached article, with the hope of it getting published in the next issues of your publications.

The background for the article is our concern, that the imaginations and focus on an Energy Descent coming to save us all is beginning to warp our focus, and that the hope it promotes is based on faulty predictions.

We think it is important to consider the need of a paradigm shift in the thinking of permaculturists collectively, away from believing we can manage making 'a beautiful world' happen before the crash sets in. Hence, the title "Permaculture, Plan B". But all the thinking behind that is better described through the article itself..

We would like to have the article illustrated as attached - but of course in original quality pictures to be sent to you, should you wish to make use of these proposed illustrations.

In best regards

Poul Erik Pedersen
On behalf of 'the rest of the editors' ;-)

Permaculture, Plan B

(Peak Oil, Energy Increase, and the Dangers of Shifting in Permaculture Foci)

Written by Poul Erik Pedersen and Tony Andersen, with the support of the other participants at the scandinavian Permaculture Teachers' Seminar in Svenshögen, Sweden, March the 3rd-5th, 2006: Chris Druid, Dan Frendin, Henning Hervik, Per Rune Hollup, Peter Norrthon.

We live in interesting times, to say the least. As pointed out so clearly by Patrick Whitefield in his article 'The Crash' (Permaculture Magazine no. 47, Spring 2006) the break down of human global society now seems unavoidable, due to the increasing unsustainability of human activity on Earth.

The evidence for this is multiple and ever mounting, and the gloomy prospect seems plausible on the background alone that crises are rising in so many vital areas for human sustenance: Energy supply, water supply, food supply, soil deterioration, erosion and deforestation, climate change. Added to which comes the increasing scarcity of mineral resources and the whole complexity of economic and political instability in the world.

This may seem obvious, almost to the point of being banal. After all, most of us are already living in the middle of the developing breakdowns. But underneath the obvious, this also points to a psychological truth that is more subtle and evasive in its nature.

As indicated by Patrick in his article, we permaculturists have almost always been working from a notion, that what we were doing would help prevent disaster and save the planet into a situation of sustainability and wellness of life. It might even be true to say that the wish and hope of being able to avoid the looming ecological breakdown is what caused the whole Permaculture Movement to be born in the first place and gain momentum.

This was the prospect possible from the early '70ies: That by distributing the knowledge and practice of permaculture we would be able to partake in 'saving the world' from its destructive trace. And it might well be true to say that this hope and wish got printed into the subconscious of us permaculture people. And that we as a collective are still motivated by a vision of being able to produce a beautiful way of life so appealing and

strong, that we would be able to multiply, gain majority and help humanity avoid disaster, almost automatically by the self explaining and convincing nature of permaculture in itself.

Maybe this is the central and most governing thought pattern that accounts for the apparent rise in desperation that now seems to occur, in permaculture writings and presentations, projects, of recent years.

One expression of this 'subconscious desperation', as we see it, is the sudden focus that has appeared now on Peak Oil and Energy Descent, increasingly so during the last 2 years or so – and so well described and introduced to in the last issue of the Permaculture Activist, no 59.

Yes, there is developing an Oil Peak situation, this we don't doubt. And it will be likely to have some very disturbing impacts on societies and economies, this we don't doubt either. But we doubt very much that the Oil Peak will bring about an Energy Descent situation, where societies globally will adjust themselves to a situation of radically reduced energy consumption in a relatively short time – as also pointed out in some of the articles in the Activist.

As an example, in Denmark, the power plants have already become readjusted to be able to work on coal powder which is a fossil energy resource that is still available in abundance. And all over the world the nuclear power lobbies are again on the move, knowing that time and climate change are working for them. Chances are that the worlds future energy supply will be based on coal powder and nuclear power by majority, within the foreseeable future. Supplemented of course by renewable energy resources but only as a minor energy source within the total, perhaps by 30-40%, if we are lucky, and primarily to be used in the less densely populated regions of the world, different to the technology-demanding cities of the world, now habitat for more than half of the worlds population.

This prediction is supported by the recent energy deal made by Bush's USA, in companionship with a.o. China and India, focusing on the development of more energy efficient technology rather than reduction of the total energy consumption as such. This deal was made in response to the Kyoto agreement, because Kyoto was seen as a threat to economy, and it is notable that this alternative deal is made between some of the heaviest players on the global CO₂-emission scene.

Then there is also the talk about the hydrogen-society coming to save us all. And hydrogen will be less polluting as a fuel, that's true. But making hydrogen is an enormously energy-consuming process, based on putting electricity through water. And if the oil has run out this electricity can only come from one place: Huge power plants working on coal or nuclear energy and in some parts of the world also wind, water, waves and solar energy. But whichever the energy source, the world demand for energy will continue increasing enormously, also in a coming hydrogen-era.

Given the insatiable nature of humans, there is no reasonability in thinking that energy consumption will decrease, as long as there are alternative sources available. On the contrary, it is most likely that energy consumption globally will continue to rise for a good long first half of this century, even in spite of increasing evidence that this will also continue to increase the pressures on the world's climatic and political stability.

“Thus, we believe that world change will be more likely to enforce itself on the background of water shortages, violent weather phenomena and rising sea levels, combined with the expectable chaotic conflicts for control over resources.”

Thus, we believe that world change will be more likely to enforce itself on the background of water shortages, violent weather phenomena and rising sea levels, combined with the expectable chaotic conflicts for control over resources. And that this process will be catastrophic in nature, rather than adjusting to peaceful sustainability. The catastrophe probably won't happen all over the world in one go, but it will probably be in the form of increasing numbers of local 'disaster phenomena' happening in different countries and regions, at ever increasing rates.

In this context, the word 'crash' itself can be misleading. Because when we say 'crash' we think of some accident that happens fast, whereafter the smoke will clear and everyone just have to adapt to a new set of conditions. But what if 'the crash' will take form as one long grinding series of breakdowns that will be smouldering on destructively for the next 50-100 years? In that

case, we can't hope for any kind of relief aspect within the crash situation, but we had better in stead adopt a robust stance of being prepared for a lifetime's permanent crisis management. (Which in some ways we have already become forced to).

But still, then, why do we want to argue against focusing on Peak Oil and Energy Descent, if the Oil Peak may also add to the catastrophes? Well, for two reasons. One, because we see it as a symptom of wanting to fasten on a singular, graspable problem from a wish to come up with some singular, graspable solutions, and that this will constitute a structural warp in our reasonings and analyses. And two, because if we make sound in media about "The Oil Peak is coming!", and the Oil Peak doesn't bring disaster, it will add to the public view of us as being a bunch of untrustworthy dreamers, and it will in the meantime have stolen attention from more dangerous breakdowns developing.

Referring to the title of this article again, we are as permaculturists no longer in a situation where we can expect the crash to be avoidable. Plan A didn't work – we couldn't prevent the crash (or crashes) from coming. Now is therefore the time where we must change our mind set and look for activating plan B in stead: And that is, to look for how we can equip ourselves to handle the crashes, as they will be developing, and how we can enable ourselves to play a constructive role in the coming times of turbulence and great collective stress.

As Jonathan Dawson points out in his article, also in PM47, this will require a.o. that we in our projects and approaches to the surrounding society systematically seek to become of essential value to our local surroundings. If not, we will likely be sacrificed and washed away in the inevitable conflicts to come, and the primitive processes of protectionist exclusion that will be the expectable response of society groupings. This is a worrying prospect to the extent of ecovillages and permaculture projects having developed elitist and isolationist attitudes towards their surrounding bioregions.

The concept of bioregions comes in here as the important tool of permaculture. In fact, if we want to survive the crash, we should already now start building up some robust bioregional networks in order to have the people, the knowledge and the contacts ready for action, organised geographically according to what areas can supply themselves with all basic resources, in preparedness for the case of our modern vulnerable supply-systems failing under

one or more of the environmental crises threatening. In Scandinavia we have already started building up such a bioregional network covering the region around 'Oeresund' – the narrow sound dividing Scania (Southern Sweden) from Zealand (Eastern Denmark).

Thus, it becomes a basic necessity for handling the crash that we don't start shifting in our foci, from what has always been at the core of permaculture: The balanced, rational and effective analyses of resource circuits with the attached toolbox of practical advices of how to create permanently sustainable settlements. Being very practical, down-to-earth and based on ecologically scientific weighings of evidences.

We shouldn't start looking for new foci in search for visions of singular, accommodating solutions. This is to look for symptom treatment, and it will fail producing durable results for us. We must stay with the multiplicity of wholesome analyses of permaculture, searching for the causes rather than the symptoms, going from the bottom up, even if it doesn't produce spectacular results that look convincing and appealing in the eyes of world media, today.

“Forests and other forms of densely planted landscapes have always been the main accumulators and cleaners of our vital natural resources – soil, water, clean air and oxygen, energy resources.”

One approach that can help us to maintain this multiple focus would be to keep promoting the aspect of forestation and plantation generally, as we always did, right from the beginning. Forests and other forms of densely planted landscapes have always been the main accumulators and cleaners of our vital natural resources – soil, water, clean air and oxygen, energy resources. And still we should look to the forests for solutions and examples of sustainability, and as a spectacle for permaculture analyses and action programs. This might help us stay focused on the core values and advices, practices of permaculture, that won't lose their pertinence as long as Earth's ecological dynamics and natural laws stay the same.

Patrick Whitefield, in his article, proposes as part of the solution, that we should do what we can to become part of the mainstream and get more

visible. Ideally, of course, this is true. But experience tells us, that mainstream integration is a soul-exorcising practice. The mainstream will never applaud our suggested solutions. Because what mainstream society wants is relief from feelings of uncomfotability and pain. Which is not the same as remedy or cure. Thus, if we go mainstream, the prospect is that we'll adapt to what mainstream wants, and lose our justifying base in the process. What we should do in stead, is to stay 'headstream' – keeping our departure points in pristine shape, our tools fit and sharpened, continuing to develop the accuracy and integrity of the PC concept, ready for use till the day demands may spring from a serious understanding of needs and mechanisms, and a serious will to do what it takes at the causing ends, rather than from the ignorant and spoilt wishes of today's world to maintain our extravagant lifestyle.

Let's not get sidetracked by wishful thinking. The world is far too dangerous already as it is, and it is going to get worse during the next coming decades, until the world population collectively will no longer be able to deny the factuality of our mutual disaster trace, and the fact that the solutions must be equally mutual. But until that happens, we must hope for the best, but plan for the worst! And work hard to prevent the most primitive traces in human nature from becoming invigorated and coming to surface.

We need as permaculturists to stay rational and cool in our analyses, not to start blurring our reasonings by envisioning bright futures from an internal need to save optimism and a gratifying self view.

If the future for the time being looks depressing, so be it. We think it is better to have a clear view of the world, even if it is depressing, rather than to integrate a systematic warp into our ongoing analyses just to be able to keep up good spirits. – Spirits that will only be trustworthy and able to show sustainability in a constantly developing friendship and trustful cooperation.

In our developed permaculture strategies and connections that would mean setting up our bioregional network and structure. A process that we in the Oeresund region are developing on the basis of a couple of hundred devoted permaculturists and associates – setting up a network that would be able to provide the 4 million inhabitants within the region with all basic resources, including sustainable energy.

A task that within the next hundred years will give much enjoyment, pleasure and a lot of hope for the

future for ourselves and our grandchildren – and a

project that we got a price for in 1996, in recognition from three different ministries in Denmark.



“And still we should look to the forests for our solutions...” View over the lake at Svenshögen village, with forest covered hills in the background. March 06. Photo: Poul Erik Pedersen



The 'Øresund-region' – that is Southwest Sweden and the Danish island of Zealand, including the capital of Copenhagen – might comfortably provide its 4 mio. inhabitants with all basic resources, if infrastructure and self supply agriculture got geared for it. This includes sustainable energy based on wood chips harvested from the extensive Swedish forests, combined with renewable energy (wind, water, a.o.) and 20-30% reduction of energy consumption. The calculations for this were checked and approved by official experts in relation to a price-winning project on the theme 'Sustainability for Big Cities', Frederiksberg Municipality, Copenhagen, 1996. Drawing: Tony Andersen.



Discussion Group at the Teacher's Seminar in Svenshögen, March 06. From the left: Dan Frendin, Peter Norrthon, Chris Druid, Henning Hervik. Photo: Poul Erik Pedersen.

Fra: Permaculture Magazine, Maddy Harland

Sendt: 27. marts 2006 14:42

Til: Poul Erik Pedersen; PeterBane

Emne: Re: Proposal for article for the Activist / the Magazine - 'PlanB'

Dear All,

Your article is very interesting but it appears to wrongly assume a number of things which include:

That peak oil/gas will not have fast-acting effects and is not critical. The Editor of Petroleum Review, an oil industry publication, already thinks oil peaked in 2005 and that view is shared by many geologists. We are already seeing large increases in cost for domestic and industrial supplies of oil and gas in the UK which has triggered a small but significant recession. This, we believe, is just the beginning of fuel poverty. Yes, we have plenty of coal but little else. Our nuclear programme is totally out of date – we buy electricity generated from nuclear plants from France in the UK – and new UK nuclear generation cannot come on stream for a decade if we start building now and there is not the political will to do so.

Permaculture, mainstream or not, will not solve climate change. It is too late to reverse it within the next 100 years. I think my editorials are clear about the gravity of our situation on this planet.

That planned energy descent will be comfortable – at PM we do not think this, hence Patrick's article about the Crash. We are in fact keen to indicate the opposite. We agree with you. Plan B is what is needed.

I would therefore like to suggest to you that you rewrite your article introducing the concept of Plan B as something that is understood editorially and tell us all about what you have been doing in Scandinavian on a bioregional basis to create the possibility of a sustainable future for 4 million people.

We would be delighted to receive that article.

Please make it as succinct as possible with practical examples that others can experiment with in their bioregion. Please share your knowledge and experience!

Thank you very much for being in touch.

Maddy Harland

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on 3/24/06 12:43 PM, Poul Erik Pedersen wrote:

Dear Maddy, Dear Peter!

<<...>>

Fra: Scott Horton
Sendt: 27. marts 2006 22:09
Til: Poul Erik Pedersen
Emne: Activist submisison

Dear Poul,

Thank you for your recent submission on peak oil and energy descent, which I plan to run in our "Movement Musings" department as edited in the attached.

"Movement Musings" is the department in which we run opinion pieces from readers. As such, I am running your piece as a response to the peak oil and energy descent dialogue embodied in our issue #59, which you reference.

However, taking off my editor's hat, I must say that I personally disagree with many of the points you make in your opinion piece--this will not keep me from running it because it is important to us to present a balance of opinions.

Chiefly, in your assertion that consideration of energy descent sways us from our misison as a "movement," you miss the larger, more important point.

Isn't it the purpose and beauty of permaculture to offer solutions-oriented strategies based on obserbvation and analysis regardless of the problem or challenge at hand? Isn' it universal? Doesn't the same permaculture design process operate whether on a community, garden, or village scale as well as when addressing larger problems like global warming, peak oil fallout, and energy descent? I am not convinced by your arguments that using permaculture to address these larger and urgent challenges somehow blurs our focus--this theory makes little sense under scrutiny. It's all the same permaculture.

It's terrific and inspriing that you are organizing and planning to meet the needs in crisis of your bioregion--this is a good idea under any circumstances. But to assert that a focus on impending energy descent is wrong-headed, not permaculturally sound, and somehow cow-towing to "mainstream media" in the face of global observation and mountains of data is to stick your heads in the sand.

Were your piece not purely opinion, I would have liked to have seen it include more factual and practical information. For instance, readers are interested in specific details and real projects that they can translate and use in their designs and communities. FOr example, it would have been great for them to know specifically how you are planning to provide for the needs of four million people in your area--as you have been been doing for more than 10 years according ro your piece--more than simply "organizing a network" as you describe it.

Again, many thanks for your submission, for participating in the dialogue on peak oil and energy descent, and for your good work in Scania.

Best wishes,

Scott Horton
Editor, Permaculture Activist

Fra: Poul Erik Pedersen
Sendt: 25. april 2006 16:16
Til: 'Scott Horton'
Cc: peter bane
Emne: SV: Activist submisison

Dear Scott,

So, now, at long last, I found the time to answer your comments 'your editor's hat taken off' on our Plan B article.

Well, to be more truthful, I would probably have made a response some time sooner if I had known better what to say to you. Because in reality, I don't quite understand your comments. It sounds to me like you have misunderstood some of the central details within our message.

Your first comment is that we have missed the larger, more important point by not wanting to apply permaculture to the prospect of a coming energy crisis. However, to our minds, this is exactly what we do and have been doing – applying permaculture – not only to the energy crisis but to the global resource and organization crisis as a whole.

In our suggestions for a sustainable Øresunds-region we propose a mix of various renewable energy sources to take the place of fossil fuels within a 40-50 year period of changeover. Our calculations showed that this would be possible – also at metropolitan scale – if the political will was there to do it. But the political will is not there. We got a price for our project in 1996, yes, but that was only because the group of technical experts evaluating the incoming projects for the competition insisted that ours was the most coherent and wholesome answer to the question put out of how to make a large city sustainable. The politicians, however, didn't want to have anything to do with our project, and they enforced the invention of a 4th price – which is otherwise unheard of within architectural competitions – to be given to us, indicating that although they couldn't deny the validity of our suggestions, they had no intention of adopting them whatsoever.

(In this context, by the way, you have made us represent a wrongfulness by changing the wording of our article to say that our project was "honored by Danish government", in stead of "recognized by three ministries". What happened was that the projects submitted for the competition got evaluated by a committee including the three ministers of Environment, of Housing, and of Culture, together with several technical experts and two representatives of the Danish national architects' organization. However, the fact that the committee as a body – the three ministers included – awarded us the price cannot be translated as an acknowledgement from Danish government. And in fact, if the Danish government was ever asked to acknowledge our project they would probably run away screaming). Since 1996, Danish resource management has also only been developing in a worsening direction from the perspective of future sustainability, in just the same way and for the same reasons as in the rest of the industrialized world.

Anyway, getting back to the issue of applying permaculture, our work here in Scandinavia involves exactly the application of permaculture to the energy situation taken up at urban and bioregional scale, whether our politicians like the ideas of it or not. And time is working for us in this aspect, if only on a bit longer time scale than the politicians' current time horizon. So it's not that we think energy is not important in relation to permaculture. What we argue against in the Plan B article is the idea that we can expect an energy descent to happen within a short period of time. There is much evidence that mankind is already developing new technologies to push the really fatal energy crisis ahead of us for another good 40-50 years or so. Coal and nuclear energy was mentioned in the article. Since then, news have also come out that the oil companies have developed new drilling technologies that will enable them to extract ca. 50% of the total amount of oil and gas from deposits at sea, where previously it was ca. 15%. And so it might well be going on and on and on...

Maddy Harland from the Magazine – who will not be publishing our article – is also arguing that we are mistaken, saying that the world has already entered the first stages of a serious energy crisis, on the basis of the UK already now experiencing a "small but significant recession", because of rising fuel prices. But really: Can this be taken as wholesome proof that a serious change is about to happen? Didn't we already have a much more dramatic energy crisis in the early 70'ies? Did it change anything, for real?

Okay, so in the '70'ies there was still enough oil, and the crisis was caused by the oil-producing countries in the Middle East temporarily stopping the deliveries. So, today it is a different situation, and the question now being asked by many is whether this time the deposits are running dry for real. But this is what we think is arguable. There is much evidence – as described above – that humanity may well be able to make existing deposits last while at the same time developing alternative energy sources to replace the old. Probably not without some good degree of turbulence in relation to energy prices, economies and job markets, but still, this is not the same as a global, devastating crisis. And so, our point is: Would it not be more prudent and wise to include some benefit of the doubt into our reasonings and predictions concerning an impending energy crisis? Would it not be a serious wounding of the whole permaculture network's credibility to find ourselves mistaken in 5-10 years time, having screamed "The energy crash is upon us!" out over all the rooftops of the world in 2006? Only to find out later that the actual situation is developing in the way of the usual mixed picture – serious enough for those who will be hit by local crises caused by the energy situation, but not something that will be able to set the whole world as such on a different course.

Thus, we are not arguing that there will not be a critical change in relation to the global energy supply. This will come. But not just yet. Not before we are another few decades further down the road towards irreversible breakdowns. And in the meantime humanity may well be overtaken by disastrous events in various other areas – violent weather, floods, soil erosion, drought, deforestation, desertification, declining soil fertility, rising sea levels, etc., etc., etc.

All of this of course is not to say that we think this is a desirable course of events. But it adds up to us that if we are looking for an energy crisis to provoke world change, we are quite likely to be looking in the wrong place. And the reason why we want to comment on it in international PC publications is that we are detecting this thinking to come from a strong wish amongst many PC people hoping to locate a process that might form the basis of illusion that there is a simple, tangible and graspable road to world change away from the current trends. As well as illusion that can somehow take away also our frustration of today's world seeming to have such an easy job proving us permaculturists wrong – or at least easily ignored. This is the basis of the desperation we talk about. This is what we call wishful thinking. And we think it is dangerous because it is making us irrational in our reasonings and priorities. Permaculture is not an answer to minor or singular problems like shortage of a specific resource. Permaculture is – or should be – an answer to the developing environmental disasters of the world, in all of their many-faceted and interrelated complexities.

But still, and again, we are not arguing against having a focus on the energy situation, or applying permaculture to it. Quite the opposite. We just worry about the current balance within the mutual PC thinking about the envisioned energy descent, and the current motivations driving this thinking and debate. And this ought to be quite clear from our article also, if you will really read it with proper thoroughness. (Quote: "Yes, there is developing an oil peak situation (...) and it will be likely to have some very disturbing impacts on societies and economies, ...").

There is also another reason for our worry of the thinking amongst permaculturists currently: And that is that there is a tendency of wanting to close ourselves around our own small projects, more or less willfully ignoring the overruling developments of surrounding society, working at a much larger scale. This is very understandable and humanly natural, but it is also potentially very dangerous. Especially when this narrowing of focus is supported by arguments that it is done for the sake of providing rescue tools for a future crisis. When in reality, it is most often an individualistic quest, motivated by a strong wish to fulfill the personal desires and emotional longings of couples and individuals. Which is not meant to say that there is anything wrong with seeking to fulfill one's personal desires and longings, as long as it is balanced against a well reasoned and well informed awareness of the more overall, future and collective needs. And this is where we are currently detecting a worrying – if not even dangerous – development within the international debates and activities amongst permaculturists.

We see this happening also in a good number of Danish ecovillages, striving to keep up dreams and visions in spite of a daily reality being riddled with conflicts and unrealism, and sometimes even directly anti-sustainable in their activities and developments. When, as an example, ecovillages insist on building enormous and enormously resource consuming detached houses – one house per family – at the cost of mutual cooperation projects, spare time, humane surplus, friendships, marriages and sometimes even local resources. And when, as

another example, ecovillages decide that it is much more important to use their limited land resources for making a gigantic horse paddock, rather than starting to develop a sustainable self-supply agriculture and woodland system in accordance with the permaculture zone pattern. (These are all concrete examples that we have experienced in recent years in our consultancy work in Denmark. And from what we have heard and seen of examples abroad, it can be taken as a general trend internationally).

There is a good number of the ecovillages in the rich part of the world, where it is actually very easy to spot that the whole underlying motivation structure is governed to a large degree by a headstrong quest for emotional satisfaction and realization of childhood dreams. And again, – there is not anything wrong with having childhood dreams, unless they start ruling out the more educated priority makings of a grown-up world in an irrational and/or subconscious way. Quite often we see this kind of overriding process creating a situation, where the ecovillages concerned would come out with a set of not very flattering conclusions after a cool analysis of their actual resource consumption, their potential for future sustainability, and the wholesomeness of their ecological resource circuits. And this is psychologically dangerous if the aims and motivations are declared to be something very different. The whole psychology and danger of which was well indicated by Jon Dawson in his article in PM47, God bless him for his courage...

Now, in relation to your request for factual and practical information of our bioregional project in the 'Øresunds-region', that people in other places would be able to use in their own designs and communities, this is more difficult. Because the whole idea of our project is not so much a question of technical developments well fit for further experimenting elsewhere. Some technical stuff is involved of course, like the suggestion of a decentralized energy supply based on Stirling engines to be installed in housing blocks (containing hundreds of apartments per block). But the whole project is much more a question of alternative organizational structures, mostly all based on notions that should be included in the 72 hour certificate course curriculum, and thus should be known stuff for certificated permaculturists.

What we did in the project was to demonstrate by envisioned examples that the population of the whole bioregion – including the metropolis of Copenhagen – could be provided with food and other basic necessities, if there was set up a systematic relationship between the city and the surrounding agricultural areas, including return of wastes for composting, forestation for the sake of timber production and groundwater generation, etc. And then there were similar examples described concerning energy supply, suggestions for a better traffic system dramatically reducing dependency on private cars, and so on.

Similar projections and calculations could be made for bioregions in other parts of the world – and they should be made of course. But if we were to explain our Scandinavian suggestions technically, it would require for us to explain also the whole political and administrative society structure that we operate in. And this would be far too lengthy and not very interesting for your readers, since they would have to construct different approaches suited for the organizational environments that they are working in.

Thus, the core of our bioregional project concerns the organizational structures, the decision making systems of society, the administration of resource consumption and entrepreneurial developments, the political priorities, and ways of thinking about how to form society at urban and bioregional scale. In this, the first challenge was to establish a network of permaculture projects which we have been doing here since the '90ies. And the next challenge is then to convince politicians and public opinion that the notion of sustainable cities and bioregions is at all realistic and worth of serious consideration. In this, our project from 1996 served as wholesome proof according to external experts' scrutiny. But we can also conclude in hindsight that for various – and mainly psychological – reasons there is still a very long way to go before we can call ourselves successful in convincing populations that this is something to actually be taken serious...

Perhaps we should also here add the comment that we are not in any way suggesting to drop the small permaculture projects being made in the local surroundings where people live. These are vitally important as a basis of permaculture developments. But they have to be supplemented by and viewed within the umbrella of a larger bioregional strategy, and creating a network between the projects.

Perhaps, some time, we might be able to make a summarized presentation in English of our bioregional project, and we would be glad to have it presented in the Activist. But making that summarized presentation would be a

very time consuming job, and at the moment we just have to say that realistically we don't have the spare time and manpower to do it. Anyway, it was presented in speech and pictures at the IPC7-conference in Croatia last year and it will be presented again at IPC8 in Brazil next year.

Lastly, I want to make a comment also about your statement that your editing of our article is solely a question of correcting grammar and such. When I read your version, I get the impression that that is not the whole truth. I've already given the example of changing the words "...that we got a price for, in recognition from three different ministries" into "has been honored by the Danish government". (A misinterpretation that I personally think is quite understandable, even if it is misrepresenting of the truth). But there are also other changes, not related much to grammar. As an example, you have added the word "honesty" into the very last sentence, bringing a very different flavor (individualistically focused!) into the concluding note of the article in stead of the original wording that exactly tried to emphasize that it is the collective endeavors that should gain supremacy above the individualistic, if permaculture and sustainability is to prevail. And there is also the example, that it was very deliberate and as a result of discussions within our teachers' group, that we put in the four small words "for the time being" within the sentence "If the future <...> looks depressing, so be it". Because although it made the sentence more clumsy, we felt it was important to not signal a stance of pessimism without nuances, but rather to emphasize that we want to represent – not a depressing doomsday prophecy, but rather a sincere plea for adopting realism as a necessary tool for reaching future wellness...

<<...>>

But anyway, although some of your editings are problematic they are not disastrous, and we are not in any way at the point of wishing to withdraw our text. <<...>> Anyway, I would ask, if you will include a notice in the august issue of the Activist, citing a www-link to a website where the original text of the article can be read. (And what would be the deadline for formulating such a notice?)

That our controversial text will cause indignant responses amongst some readers is something we are aware of and something we accept. Because we think this is an important discussion to have now amongst permaculturists, and it is necessary to be perhaps a little provocative to shake up some of the habitual thinking patterns that we all tend to get prone to with the years.

With the best of wishes
Poul Erik Pedersen
(As the main author of the Plan B article)

P.S.: I am not unaware that I have stated our disapprovals here in a rather direct language. But I hope that you have nevertheless recognized that all of this is written out from a fundamental respect that we are really all just trying to develop permaculture towards sublimity as a tool for developing real sustainability. In which, none of us are perfect. And so, I hope you will agree with me and us to address this as another good training for us all, for the sake of our better reasonings, analyses and decision making.

Fra: Poul Erik Pedersen
Sendt: 25. april 2006 17:05
Til: Maddy Harland (PC Mgz)
Emne: VS: Activist submisison (Responses to Plan B article)

Dear Maddy

Thanks for your response and comments on our Plan B article!

Although the text here below was written in response to the comments we've received from Scott Horton at the Activist, it may serve well as a response to your comments also.

I agree with you that we are not in disagreement about the need for a Plan B. However, I think we are in disagreement about a number of the means and consequences etc. in quite some substantial areas. But I also think that we can make this be a constructive disagreement in many ways! - As long as we can manage to stay with the sometimes delicate and complex threads of reasoning, and appreciate the deeper layers and nuances within the many angles of consideration. In any case, as written below, these are important discussions for us to have now, I think.

However, let's not be put off by the fact that we are dealing with delicate and complicated stuff. It can only bring us further, if we handle it well.

In the hope that all is well with you and the Magazine,

Greetings

Poul Erik Pedersen
Landscapearchitect & Permaculture Designer

-----Oprindelig meddelelse-----

Fra: Poul Erik Pedersen
Sendt: 25. april 2006 16:16
Til: 'Scott Horton'
Cc: peter bane
Emne: SV: Activist submisison

Dear Scott,

So, now, at long last, I found the time to answer your comments 'your editor's hat taken off' on our Plan B article.

<<...>>

Fra: Permaculture Magazine, Maddy Harland
Sendt: 9. maj 2006 14:11
Til: Poul Erik Pedersen
Emne: Re: VS: Activist submisison (Responses to Plan B article)

Dear Poul,

Thanks for responding to me direct.

There is so much material below that it is difficult to respond to specifics once again but I hope you can see from issue 48 and issue 49 which will be with you by the end of May, that we maintain a diversity of views at PM and claim no absolute truths.

To be honest, I am not sure about the timescales of energy descent - I wonder who does know? - but what I observe is a shift in understanding in society here. Petrol is now almost £1.00 a litre and that is having an impact on ordinary people. Gas and electricity prices are going up all the time. Added to this, we have climate change in the news EVERY DAY. This is a very different scenario to the 1970s. Ordinary people are engaged and listening, not just greens.

I worry about permaculturists taking an entrenched view. I love debate and I too welcomed Jonathan Dawson's realistic appraisals of ecovillages. We have to debate, look at ourselves honestly, assess our ecology and not pretend to be cool and green when we are not.

It is a complex process trying to showcase permaculture in the magazine and publish divergent voices. The Activist are better at that than us. We see ourselves as a magazine for even the light green just trying things out, not necessarily the serious activist/designer, so we have this difficult role of introducing permaculture and encouraging others, rather than publishing in-house permaculture design controversy. AND we try not to be superficial. I think the combination is impossible!

As an editor, I know I don't have all the answers or expertise. I try and show permaculture in all of its creative guises in the Magazine. If I miss one piece of the vision I like to be told and I am happy to print material that offers alternative visions - but it must be short and to the point or an article about a project.

I welcome the voices of our busy Danish friends and I applaud you for your work. It is not easy. If you have time to send me even short news about your work, please know that I hold an open mind and welcome your news. If you want to write me a letter about energy descent, please make it succinct and to the point. Then I can publish it.

With best wishes,

Maddy

on 4/25/06 4:05 PM, Poul Erik Pedersen wrote:

> Dear Maddy

<<...>>

Fra: Scott Horton
Sendt: 25. april 2006 18:57
Til: Poul Erik Pedersen
Emne: RE: SV: Activist submisison

Dear Poul,

Thank you for your remarks and response, I found them much more cogent and persuasive than your original submisison.

The word "ministry" as opposed to "minister" implies in English a department or body, usually of official stature, not an independent agent, hence, my understanding of your use of the word with reference to your prize as a government honor.

Had you submitted your piece on or before our March 1 deadline (not on March 20 as you did) and had you responded to my March 27 e-mail in a timely manner (your response was April 7) I would have been better able to accommodate your additional input.

I would be happy to consider anything you submit in the future favorably as long as it fits our guidelines, which I attach for your reference, and I, too, consider our exchange important, interesting, and resepectful.

Best wishes,

Scott Horton

>From: "Poul Erik Pedersen"
>To: "'Scott Horton'"
>CC: "peter bane"
>Subject: SV: Activist submisison
>Date: Tue, 25 Apr 2006 16:15:34 +0200
>
>Dear Scott,
>
>So, now, at long last, I found the time to answer your comments _your
>editor_s hat taken off_ on our Plan B article.

<<...>>

Movement Musings

Peak Oil Clouds Our Focus

Poul Erik Pedersen and Tony Andersen

THE SUDDEN AND INCREASING FOCUS on peak oil and energy descent, so well described and introduced in the last issue of *Permaculture Activist* #59, can be seen as an expression of subconscious desperation.

Yes, there is a developing oil peak situation, this we don't doubt. And it likely will have some very disturbing impacts on societies and economies, this we don't doubt either. But we doubt very much that the oil peak will bring about an energy descent situation, where societies globally will adjust themselves to a situation of radically reduced energy consumption in a relatively short time—as also forecast in some of the articles in the *Activist*.

We live in interesting times, to say the least. As pointed out so clearly by Patrick Whitefield in his article "The Crash" (*Permaculture Magazine* #47, Spring 2006) the breakdown of human global society now seems unavoidable due to the increasing unsustainability of human activity on Earth.

The evidence for this is manifest and ever mounting, and the gloomy prospect seems plausible based on the background alone that crises are rising in so many vital areas for human sustenance: energy supply, water supply, food supply, soil deterioration, erosion, deforestation, and climate change. Added to which are the increasing scarcity of mineral resources and the whole complexity of economic and political instability in the world.

This may seem obvious, almost to the point of being banal. After all, most of us are already living in the middle of the developing breakdowns. But underneath the obvious, there is also a psychological truth that is more subtle and evasive in its nature.

As indicated by Patrick in his article, we permaculturists have almost always been working from a notion that what we are doing would help prevent disaster and save the planet, transforming it into a situation of sustainability and wellness. It might even be true to say that the wish and hope of being able to avoid the looming ecological breakdown is what caused the whole permaculture movement to be born and gain momentum in the first place.

This was the prospect possible from the early 1970s: that by distributing the knowledge and practice of permaculture we would be able to participate in saving the world from a destructive path. And it might well be true to say that this hope and wish was imprinted onto the subconscious of permaculturists. We as a collective are still motivated by a vision of being able to produce a beautifully appealing and strong way of life, that we would be able to multiply, gain a majority, and help humanity avoid disaster almost automatically by the self-explanatory and convincing nature of permaculture in itself.

Maybe this is the central and most governing thought pattern

that accounts for the apparent rise in desperation that seems to be appearing in permaculture writings, presentations, and projects of recent years.

Examples in Denmark that refute the predictions of energy descent are the power plants that have already been adjusted to be able to work on coal powder, a fossil energy resource that is still available in abundance. Also, all over the world, the nuclear power lobbies are again on the move, knowing that time and climate change are working for them. Chances are that the world's future energy supply will be based mostly on coal powder and nuclear power, within the foreseeable future. These energy sources will be supplemented, of course, by renewable energy resources but only as a minor energy source within the total—perhaps by 30-40%, if we are lucky. These latter sources will be used primarily in less densely populated regions of the world where needs are different from the energy-demanding cities, now habitat for more than half of the global population.

This prediction is supported by the recent energy deal made by Bush's USA with China and India, focusing on the development of more energy-efficient technology rather than reducing the total energy consumption. This deal was made in response to the Kyoto agreement, because Kyoto was seen as a threat to the economy, and it is notable that this alternative deal was made between some of the heaviest players on the global CO2 emission scene.

There is also the talk about the hydrogen-society coming to save us all. It is true that hydrogen will be less polluting as a fuel. But making hydrogen is an enormously energy-intensive process, based on putting electricity through water. And if the oil has run out this electricity can only come from one place: Huge power plants working on coal or nuclear energy and in some parts of the world wind, water, waves, and solar energy. But whatever the energy source, the world demand for energy will continue increasing enormously, no less in a coming hydrogen era.

Given the insatiable nature of humans, there is no reason to think that energy consumption will decrease, as long as there are alternative sources available. On the contrary, it is most likely that energy consumption globally will continue to rise for the first half of this century, in spite of increasing evidence that this will also continue to increase the pressures on the world's climatic and political stability.

Thus, we believe that world change will be more likely to enforce itself on the background of water shortages, violent weather phenomena, and rising sea levels, combined with the expectable chaotic conflicts for control over resources. And that this process will be catastrophic in nature, rather than adjusting to

peaceful sustainability. The catastrophe probably won't happen all over the world in one go, but it will probably be in the form of increasing numbers of local disaster phenomena happening in different countries and regions at ever increasing rates.

In this context, the word "crash" itself can be misleading. When we say "crash" we think of some accident that happens fast, whereafter the smoke will clear and everyone just has to adapt to a new set of conditions. But what if the "crash" will take form as one long grinding series of breakdowns that will be smoldering destructively on for the next 50 to 100 years? In that case, we can't hope for any kind of relief within the crash

... if we make noise in the media—"the oil peak is coming!"—and the peak doesn't bring disaster, it will add to the public view of us as being a bunch of untrustworthy dreamers.

situation, but we had better instead adopt a robust stance of being prepared for a lifetime of permanent crisis management (to which we have already become accustomed in some ways).

So why do we want to argue against focusing on peak oil and energy descent, if the oil peak may also add to the catastrophes? For two reasons: because we see it as a symptom of wanting to fasten on a simple, graspable problem from a wish to come up with some simple, graspable solutions, and that if held to, this will create a structural warp in our reasoning and analyses. Second, because if we make noise in the media—"the oil peak is coming!"—and the peak doesn't bring disaster, it will add to the public view of us as being a bunch of untrustworthy dreamers, and it will in the meantime have stolen attention from the more dangerous breakdowns that are developing.

We, as permaculturists, are no longer in a situation where we can expect the crash to be avoidable. Plan A didn't work—we couldn't prevent the crash (or crashes) from coming. Therefore, now is the time we must change our mindset and look to activate plan B instead. Plan B is to look for how we can equip ourselves to handle the crashes and how we can enable ourselves to play a constructive role in the coming times of turbulence and great collective stress.

As Jonathan Dawson points out in his article, also in *Permaculture Magazine #47*, this will require that our projects and approaches to the surrounding society systematically become of essential relevance to our local communities. If not, we will likely be sacrificed and washed away in the inevitable conflicts to come, and the primitive processes of protectionist exclusion that will be the expectable response of society. This is a worrying

prospect for those ecovillages and permaculture projects that have developed elitist and isolationist attitudes towards their surrounding bioregions.

The concept of bioregions comes is an important tool of permaculture. If we want to survive the crash, we should start building up some robust bioregional networks. This will ensure that we have the people, the knowledge, and the contacts ready for action. We should be organized geographically into regions that can supply themselves with all basic resources in preparation for the advent of our vulnerable modern supply systems failing under one or more of the impending environmental crises. In Scandinavia we have already started building such a bioregional network covering the region around Øresund, the narrow sound dividing Scania in southern Sweden from Zealand in eastern Denmark. We are hard at work developing this strategy with the participation of a couple hundred devoted permaculturists and associates who are setting up a network that would be able to provide the four million inhabitants of the region with all basic resources, including sustainable energy. This is a task we expect will give much enjoyment, pleasure, and a lot of hope for ourselves and our grandchildren during the coming 100 years, and the project already has been honored by the Danish government in 1996.

It becomes a basic necessity for handling the crash(es) that we don't start shifting our foci away from what has always been at the core of permaculture: the balanced, rational, and effective analyses of resource cycles with the relevant practical experiences of how to create permanently sustainable systems. This is a very practical, down-to-earth approach based on ecologically scientific consideration of evidence.

We shouldn't start looking for new foci in search of visions of simple solutions. This would be like treating only the symptoms, and it will fail to produce durable results. We must stay with the multiplicity of holistic analyses of permaculture, searching for the causes rather than the symptoms, even if this doesn't produce spectacular results that look convincing and appealing in the eyes of world media.

One approach that could help us to maintain this multiple focus would be to keep promoting the aspect of reforestation and plantation, as we always have, right from the beginning. Forests and other forms of densely planted landscapes have always been the main accumulators and cleaners of our vital natural resources—soil, water, clean air, oxygen, and energy resources. We should continue to look to the forests for solutions and models of sustainability, and as an opportunity for permaculture analyses and action. This might help us stay focused on the core values, wisdom, and practices of permaculture that won't lose their relevance as long as Earth's ecological dynamics and natural laws stay the same.

Patrick Whitefield, in his article, proposes as part of the solution, that we should do what we can to become part of the mainstream and get more visible. Ideally, of course, this is true. But experience tells us that mainstream integration is a soul-exorcising practice. The mainstream may never applaud our suggested solutions. What mainstream society wants is relief from feelings of discomfort and pain, which is not the same as

remedy or cure. Thus, if we go mainstream, the prospect is that we'll adapt to what the mainstream wants, and lose our base in the process. What we should do instead, is to stay "headstream"—keeping our departure points in pristine shape and our tools fit and sharpened. We must continue to develop the accuracy and integrity of permaculture concepts, techniques, and practices. Only then will they be ready for use when the day demands, stemming from a serious understanding of needs and mechanisms and a serious will to do what it takes rather than simply react to the ignorant and spoiled wishes of today's world to maintain an extravagant lifestyle.

Let's not get sidetracked by wishful thinking. The world is far too dangerous already as it is. It is going to get worse during the coming decades until the collective world population will no longer be able to deny the fact of our mutual disaster trajectory. The fact is that the solutions must be adopted equitably. But until that happens, we must hope for the best and plan for the worst. We must work hard to prevent the most primitive impulses in human nature from coming to surface and being invigorated.

As permaculturists, we need to stay rational and cool in our analyses and not blur the focus of our reason by dreaming of bright futures from an internal need to preserve optimism and gratify self-indulgence.

If the future looks depressing, so be it. We think it is better to have a clear view of the world even if it is depressing rather than systematically to integrate flaws into our ongoing observations and analyses just to be able to keep up good spirits. Our spirits will be trustworthy and able to develop sustainable living systems only by constantly developing relationships based on honesty and cooperation.

A

Chris Druid, Dan Frendin, Henning Hervik, Per Rune Hollup, and Peter Norrthon, participants at the Scandinavian Permaculture Teachers' Seminar in Svenshgen, Sweden, March 3-5, 2006, contributed to this article.

Editor's Response

While I appreciate the point the authors make that we need to stay the course with permaculture and not spin off in pursuit of the trendy, I think they miss the point of our own coverage of peak oil, as well as that in *Permaculture Magazine*, and the greater relevance of permaculture in providing solutions to the crises that will doubtless come with energy transition or descent. Isn't permaculture universal? Aren't the same processes of observation, analysis, design, and implementation equally valid whether on a garden, home, village, bioregional, or larger scale? Aren't the same crises that Pedersen, Andersen, and company describe—threats to supplies of energy and food, soil erosion, deforestation, climate change, and breakdowns in society—likely

to worsen as the peak oil clock ticks on? Aren't they getting worse right now? I am not convinced by their arguments that considering these crises under the rubric of energy descent or peak oil somehow distracts us from our course and blurs our focus. On the contrary, it has clearly rallied us around a unifying and genuine issue that should concern us all. The real and potential crises are largely the same no matter what we call them, and after all is said and done, it's still the same permaculture that can propose solutions.

The authors' acquiescence to their forecast that global lobbies will succeed in making coal and nuclear power our future's predominant energy sources is puzzling. Coal dust has been linked to cancer and juvenile respiratory disease, and coal smoke is among the most poisonous of industrial emissions, adding among other things, carbon and radioactive waste to the atmosphere. Tailings and residue from coal mining hyper-acidify and poison soil and water. The health and living standards of coal miners and residents of mining areas are among the most wretched worldwide. Yes, it's possible to reduce toxic emissions in the process of generating electricity from coal dust and perhaps this is the way it's being done in Denmark; the authors don't say. But if the authors truly believe in the insatiable, self-indulgent nature of humanity as they indicate, how can they trust that future coal-based electricity will be clean? Tons of data about the dangers and inefficiencies of nuclear power are common knowledge today, so I don't need to say more on that topic. (To taste just the tip of this toxic iceberg, readers may refer to Albert Bates' review of James Lovelock's *Gaia's Revenge* in this issue.)

The suggestion that permaculturists' consideration of and planning for energy descent amounts to kowtowing to the "mainstream media," that we should stop for fear that peak oil is an embarrassing miscalculation, and that we'll be ridiculed if the threat doesn't materialize is absurd. Does it make sense to allow fear of judgement by the "mainstream" to interfere with prudent thought, community education and involvement, intelligent dialogue, planning, and positive action? It's almost like saying that we shouldn't focus on growing organic produce because if the "mainstream" prefers to eat fast food, we'll all be shamed.

Pedersen, Andersen, and friends are right about this: bioregionalism is an important tool of permaculture and we need to focus on projects of essential relevance on local and regional levels if we expect to succeed in having positive impacts. And, of course, let's not stop our hard work just to chew the fat about energy descent—they are right too that there is much to be done. I admire and applaud their important and established work in Scania. But permaculture, bioregionalism, peak oil, and energy descent are not mutually exclusive. In the face of global observation and mountains of data, to dismiss peak oil as insignificant or contrary to some idea of "true" permaculture would be to stick our heads in the sand and ignore the power and possibilities of permaculture to engender meaningful change. Δ

Scott Horton is Editor of the Permaculture Activist. He teaches at the Ecovillage Training Center at The Farm, in his native California, and in Mexico.

Fra: Poul Erik Pedersen
Sendt: 19. maj 2006 16:09
Til: 'Chris Druid'; 'Dan Frendin'; 'Henning Hervik'; 'Per Rune Hollup'; 'Peter Norrthon'; 'Tony Andersen'
Emne: Mere tekst om Plan B

Kære Alle

Permaculture Activist er nu udkommet med vores artikel. Og et response fra redaktøren, som går temmelig hårdt til os!

Jeg har skrevet på et svar. Deadline for næste issue er 1. juni, så vi har kun godt en uge til at redigere på det.

Jeg har vedhæftet mit udkast til et svar, samt artiklerne og responset fra Activist - i meget dårlig opløsning. Jeg har dem også i mere læselig version, men så fylder de ca. 800 KB pr. side. Giv mig besked, hvis I ønsker dem tilsendt.

Om Udkastet: Det kan i princippet holdes på de første 1½ side. Men jeg synes, det ville være godt at få uddybet bioregion-diskussionen også. Jeg kan bare ikke lige finde ud af at gøre det kort. Tilbagemeldinger er velkomne!

Bedste hilsner Poul Erik

Translation:

Dear All,

Permaculture Activist has now been published with our article. And with a response from the editor, that is rather hard on us!

I have been writing on an answer. Deadline for the next issue is June the 1st, so we only have a good week to edit on it.

I have attached my draft, together with the articles and the editor's response – although in very poor dpi-quality. I have them also in a more readable version, but they are 800 KB per page. Please notify me, if you want me to mail them to you.

Conc. the draft: It could be cut down to only the first 1½ page. But I think it would be good to have the bioregional discussion laid out also. I just can't quite find out how to make it shorter. Your comments are much welcomed!

Best greetings Poul Erik

**Comment to the Editor's Response on
'Movement Musings – Peak Oil Clouds Our
Focus'.**

Editor Scott Horton has placed a response next to our article in the last issue of the Activist (#60, May 2006, pp. 38-40, originally titled 'Permaculture, Plan B'). In his response, Scott characterizes our lines of argument by words such as 'puzzling' and 'absurd'. Strong words in May! We believe, however, that these words stem from a misunderstanding of our actual message and motivation for writing the article.

(Please note: The structure of our original article has been changed – as well as some of the wordings –through the editing process before publishing. If you want to read the original text, it can be found at the website <http://home.no.net/pruneh/planb.html>).

But now, back to Scott's response: First of all, we have to emphasize that we are not in any way advocating for coal or nuclear energy as a future energy supply, quite the contrary! But we are making the observation that this is the way the world is already going. And we predict that this – together with other factors – may well postpone the Energy Descent for several decades.

Scott is perfectly right in his descriptions of the devastating consequences of coal mining and using coal as a fuel. What is not evident, however, is that this will stop the world from increasing the use of coal anyway.

Right now, in Denmark, one of our major newspapers is running a series of articles on the industrial developments in China, and what they have to tell about the already manifest damages from coal mining and usage is just heartbreakingly terrible. But nevertheless, it keeps going on and on. China's coal production is exploding these years. And there is coal enough in this world for the next hundred years and more, even with increasing demands.

Nuclear energy has much the same story: The damages in its trail are terrible. It's expensive beyond imagination. It's not CO2-neutral if you include mining, building and decommissioning in the accountings. The security problems are unsolved. The waste problems are unsolved. It's in all thinkable ways a terrible heritage to establish for coming generations to have to deal with. But still you can be pretty sure, this world's decision makers

will be going for it anyway, as a short termed solution to what they see isolatedly as an acute energy problem. These very years Finland and France are taking the lead in Europe starting to build new nuclear power plants that will become a vital part of the electricity supply – not only in these countries specifically, but for the whole of Europe – for decades.

Also there is a constant development of new energy technologies to take into account. As an example, after we wrote the Plan B article, news have come out that the oil companies have developed new drilling technologies that will enable them to extract ca. 50% of the oil deposits at sea, where previously it was ca. 15%. And so it might just be going on and on.

Again, this is not to say that we consider this a desirable course of development. But it adds up to us that if we are looking for an energy crisis to be the kick-off for world change, we are quite likely to be looking in the wrong place.

Still, we are not saying "Don't look at the energy aspect" in relation to permaculture. In fact, our work here in Scandinavia involves exactly the application of permaculture to the energy situation taken up at urban and bioregional scale, and we are always promoting of renewable energy sources to replace fossil fuels in our local projects and consulting work.

But we are saying that there is much evidence – as described above – that humanity may well be able to make existing fossil fuel deposits last while at the same time developing alternative energy sources to replace the old. Probably not without some good degree of turbulence in relation to energy prices, economies and job markets, but still, this is not the same as a global, devastating crisis. And so, our point is: Would it not be more prudent and wise to include some benefit of the doubt into our reasonings and predictions concerning an impending energy crisis? Would it not be a serious wounding of the whole permaculture network's credibility to find ourselves mistaken in 5-10 years time, having screamed "The energy crash is upon us!" out over the rooftops of the world in 2006? Only to find out later that the actual situation is developing in the way of the usual mixed picture – serious enough for those who will be hit by local crises caused by the energy situation, but not something that will be able to set the whole world as such on a different course.

Thus, we are not arguing that there will not be a critical change in relation to the global energy supply. This will come. But not just yet. Not before we are another few decades further down the road towards irreversible breakdowns. And in the meantime humanity may well be overtaken by disastrous events in various other areas – violent weather, floods, soil erosion, drought, deforestation, desertification, declining soil fertility, rising sea levels, etc.

But still then, why do we consider it important to bring up all this in permaculture debate forums? The answer is: Because we think that the focus on impending Energy Descent has some elements in it that may be quite dangerous for us all as a collective of permaculturists. Not because of the focus in itself, but because of what seems to motivate that focus, at least amongst some.

“Permaculture is not an answer to minor or singular problems like shortage of a specific resource. Permaculture is – or should be – an answer to the developing environmental disasters of the world, in all of their many-facetted and interrelated complexities.”

Within the sudden intensification of PC-focus on Energy Descent in recent years, we are detecting a strong wish to locate a process that might form the basis of illusion that there is a simple, tangible and graspable road to world change away from the current trends. As well as illusion that can somehow take away also our frustration of today's world seeming to have such an easy job proving us permaculturists wrong – or at least easily ignored. This is the basis of the desperation we talk about. This is what we call wishful thinking. And we think it is dangerous because it is making us irrational in our reasonings and priorities. Permaculture is not an answer to minor or singular problems like shortage of a specific resource. Permaculture is – or should be – an answer to the developing environmental disasters of the world, in all of their many-facetted and interrelated complexities.

This is why we need to keep permaculture in pristine shape as a multiple and holistic analysis- and design tool, and not start letting it be devaluated by running after the latest media focus,

trying to push it as a solution, that the mainstream population eventually won't want to understand or apply in fullness anyway (unless circumstances force it). The world is already full of devaluated 'green' words – words that have been misused and warped away from their original content – ecology and sustainability included. We don't need to add permaculture to the list. If the world continues the way it's going, there will come a time soon enough when people start looking seriously for something that can deliver what permaculture can do. What a tragedy it would be, if by that time PC has lost its capacity and integrity of definitions, just because we got a little faint-hearted in 2006 and let ourselves persuade away from basis.

The rest can be deleted all together?:

In order to keep PC pristine, we also need to keep developing it as a toolbox, into which process comes bioregionalism as a more and more important tool.

There is a tendency amongst permaculturists of wanting to close ourselves around our own small projects, more or less willfully ignoring the overruling developments of surrounding society, working at a much larger scale. This is very understandable and humanly natural, but it is also potentially very dangerous.

Can be deleted: When in Denmark we want to explain the concept of bioregionalism, we often use the story about the beautiful eco-farms on the mountainsides of Nepal that had been developed through years of devoted labor. But then came the rains, then came the mud floods, and there went the eco-farms, down the mountainsides and into the river valleys. Not because of the rain in itself, but because of the timber companies having harvested the mountains clear of protecting forest. The message of the story is clear: Any permaculture project that is acting as if it can be isolated from the overruling developments of the surrounding bioregion is courting danger, more and more so in an increasingly globalised world.

If we want to seriously promote permaculture as a tool for global sustainability, we need to work more intensively at creating bonds of exchange between permaculture projects / eco-settlings and their surrounding bioregions, creating integrated resource circuits in greater land areas as such, as well as between cities and their surrounding countryside. This relates to all the basics: Energy, food, water, building materials, extensive plantations (forestation), aids for increasing soil fertility, aids for

increasing biodiversity, access to experiencing natural systems at work, demonstration of organizational models at work, recreation, educational functions, and more. Into this comes also a greater focus on urban ecology, being that more than half the world's population is now living in cities. – And being that already built structures carry value as a resource in themselves, and thus should not be abandoned or disregarded as waste but rather modified and reused in a sustainable setting.

This does not at all imply that we argue against the many small permaculture projects being made in the local surroundings where people live. These are vitally important as a basis of permaculture developments. But they need to be supplemented by and viewed within the umbrella of a larger bioregional strategy, and creating a network between the projects.

This is what we have been working at in the Zealand-Scania region since the early '90ies. And we would love to be able to publish a summary of our price-winning bioregional suggestions from 1996, with factual and practical information that people in other places could experiment with in their own designs and communities. But this is difficult. Not only because we lack the time and manpower to make that time consuming summary. But also because the whole idea of our project is not so much a question of technical developments well suited for further experimenting elsewhere. The whole project is much more a question of alternative organizational structures.

Can be deleted: What we did in the project was to demonstrate by envisioned examples that the population of the whole bioregion – including the metropolis of Copenhagen – could be provided with food and other basic necessities, if there was set up a systematic relationship between the city and the surrounding agricultural areas, including return of wastes for composting, forestation for the sake of timber production and groundwater generation, etc. And then there were similar examples described concerning a decentralized energy supply (a.o. based on Stirling engines) fuelled mainly by wood chips, suggestions for a better traffic system dramatically reducing dependency on private cars, and so on.

(But) The core of our bioregional project concerns the (organizational structures, the) decision making systems of society, the administration of resource consumption and entrepreneurial developments, the political priorities, and ways of thinking about how to

form society at urban and bioregional scale. In this, the first challenge was to establish a network of permaculture projects which we have been doing here since the '90ies. And the next challenge is then to convince politicians and public opinion that the notion of sustainable cities and bioregions is at all realistic and worth of serious consideration. In this, our project from 1996 served as wholesome proof according to external experts' scrutiny. But we can also conclude in hindsight that for various – and mainly psychological – reasons there is still a very long way to go before we can call ourselves successful in convincing populations that this is something to actually be taken serious...

As long as the majority of middle class populations are staying happy with their new cars, their housing- and stock market gambings, and their ever increasing levels of consumption, there is not much hope that they will be genuinely interested in our ideas. But this unsustainable course will come to an end some time. And it will come to an end soon enough, since the end results of it may become very devastating – also for us permaculturists. So we must hope that the crash – even though unavoidable – sets in slowly, gradually, later rather than sooner. To be deleted?: Thus, we must try to keep ourselves well trained and prepared, alive and functioning. And we might not succeed at this, if we isolate ourselves, forget the network building and run after short termed relief visions such as the idea of a shortly impending Energy Descent, hoped for as a motor for changing over to sustainability.

It is always easy to get caught up in silent or hidden desperation. But it is neither useful nor wise. We can't expect the crash to be avoidable anymore, Plan A didn't succeed. But that shouldn't make us hopeless or fatalistic either. What we need to do is to reconsider our permacultural approaches according to a Plan B, which could perhaps carry the undertitle "How to apply permaculture as a tool in times of crisis, and how to keep ourselves safe and rational in the process".

To be deleted?: In conclusion, we are taking note for ourselves that our article seems to have hit a rather sore and perhaps not too well reflected spot amongst permaculturists. As such, we consider ourselves successful in raising a very important discussion. A discussion that will become even more important as the reality of the world's increasing unsustainability will continue to test the durability of our collective thinking, intentions and produce of permaculture.

Fra: Poul Erik Pedersen
Sendt: 31. maj 2006 18:07
Til: Permaculture Activist
Cc: 'Chris Druid'; 'Dan Frendin'; 'Henning Hervik'; 'Peter Norrthon'; 'Per Rune Hollup'; 'Tony Andersen'
Emne: Submission for the next issue of the Activist

Dear Scott,

Thanks for the last issue of the Activist, which we read with interest - particularly the pages 38-40!

As you might already expect, we would like very much to put a short comment to your response on our article, in the next issue of the Activist - much in the line of our mail-exchange after the first Plan B article was sent to you.

Just like the first article, the attached comment is a text we have all agreed upon - the participants of the scandinavian Teachers' Seminar in March - Chris Druid, Dan Frendin, Henning Hervik, Peter Norrthon, Per Rune Hollup, Tony Andersen and myself.

Needless to say, we wish for the attached piece to be printed in its original wording - unless of course you want to suggest some language-related changes that we can agree to as not disturbing the message as such.

With the best of wishes for you & the Activist - and all of our permaculture friends in the US.

Poul Erik Pedersen

Comment to the Editor's Response on 'Movement Musings – Peak Oil Clouds Our Focus'.

Editor Scott Horton has placed a response next to our article in the last issue of the Activist (#60, May 2006, pp. 38-40, originally titled 'Permaculture, Plan B'). In his response, Scott characterizes our lines of argument by words such as 'puzzling' and 'absurd'. Strong words in May! We believe, however, that these words stem from a misunderstanding of our actual message and motivation for writing the article.

(Please note: The structure of our original article has been changed – as well as some of the wordings – through the editing process before publishing. If you want to read the original text, it can be found at the website <http://home.no.net/pruneh/planb.html>).

But now, back to Scott's response: First of all, we have to emphasize that we are not in any way advocating for coal or nuclear energy as a future energy supply, quite the contrary! But we are making the observation that this is the way the world is already going. And we predict that this – together with other factors – may well postpone the Energy Descent for several decades.

Scott is perfectly right in his descriptions of the devastating consequences of coal mining and using coal as a fuel. What is not evident, however, is that this will stop the world from increasing the use of coal anyway.

Right now, in Denmark, one of our major newspapers is running a series of articles on the industrial developments in China, and what they have to tell about the already manifest damages from coal mining and usage is just heartbreakingly terrible. But nevertheless, it keeps going on and on. China's coal production is exploding these years. And there is coal enough in this world for several hundred years, even with increasing demands. Also, further development of the coal strategy is part of the "Kyoto-alternative" agreement between USA, China, India and Australia.

Nuclear energy has much the same story: It's in all thinkable ways a terrible heritage to establish for coming generations to deal with. But still you can be pretty sure, this world's decision makers will be going for it anyway. These very years Finland and France are taking the lead in Europe starting to build new nuclear power plants that will become a

vital part of the electricity supply – not only in these countries specifically, but for the whole of Europe – for decades. In China they are building 2 new plants a year and India has an agreement about the same in the "Kyoto-alternative".

And then there is also a constant development in technology to take into account. As one example, news have come out recently that the oil companies are about to implement new drilling technologies that will enable them to extract ca. 50% of the total amount of oil and gas from deposits at sea, where previously it was ca. 15%. And so it might well be going on and on.

SO, we are not saying that there will not be a critical change in relation to the global energy supply. This will come. But not just yet. Not before we are another few decades further down the road towards irreversible breakdowns. And in the meantime we are warning that the current focus on Peak Oil / Energy Descent is taking away focus from the really disastrous events in various other areas – violent weather, floods, soil erosion, drought, deforestation, desertification, declining soil fertility, rising sea levels, etc. – disasters in the natural systems, that are calling for the basic core of action in permaculture.

"This does not at all imply that we argue against the many small permaculture projects being made in the local surroundings where people live. On the contrary - these are vitally important as a basis of permaculture developments. But they need to be supplemented by and viewed within the umbrella of a larger bioregional strategy, and creating a network between the projects."

There is, however, also another background for our worry: Within the sudden intensification of permaculture-focus on Energy Descent in recent years, we are detecting a strong wish to create an illusion that there is a simple and relatively predictable road to world change away from the current trends. This illusion may also be a response to our collective frustration about today's world seeming to have such an easy job ignoring the central viewpoints and messages of permaculture.

This is the basis of the desperation we talk about. And we think it is dangerous because it is making us irrational in our reasonings and priorities. Permaculture is not an answer to minor or singular problems like shortage of a specific resource. Permaculture is an answer to the developing environmental disasters of the world, in all of their many-facetted and interrelated complexities.

In Scandinavia we focus much on promoting permaculture as a universal tool for sustainability encompassing all aspects of modern society. In this perspective, it has been clear for many years that we need to work more intensively at creating bonds of exchange between permaculture projects / eco-settlements and their surrounding bioregions. Thus, creating integrated resource circuits of the basic elements of permaculture: Energy, food, water, plantation (forestation), waste products, building materials, organizational structures, etc. This concerns not only rural areas, but also concerns the resource circuits between cities and their surrounding countryside. More than half the world's population is now living in cities. And buildings already constructed are valuable resources as such, having potential for sustainable habitation for large numbers of people. Thus, there is also a need of strong focus on urban ecology within the

permaculture movement. And this is then another motivation for a multi-facetted network approach, as different to a singular or isolationist ditto.

This does not at all imply that we argue against the many small permaculture projects being made in the local surroundings where people live. On the contrary - these are vitally important as a basis of permaculture developments. But they need to be supplemented by and viewed within the umbrella of a larger bioregional strategy, and creating a network between the projects.

This is what we have been working at in the Zealand-Scania region of Scandinavia since the early 90's.

It is always easy to be caught up in silent or hidden desperation, sometimes expressed as wishful thinking. But this is neither useful nor wise. We can't expect the crash to be avoidable anymore, Plan A didn't succeed. But that shouldn't make us hopeless or fatalistic either. Or forcibly optimistic for that matter. What we need to do is to reconsider our permacultural approaches according to a Plan B, which could perhaps be undertitled "How to apply permaculture as a tool in times of crisis, and how to keep ourselves safe and rational in the process".

BIOREGIONAL STRUCTURE IN THE ZEALAND / SCANIA REGION

SUMMER 2006

In 1996 did the Permaculture Group in Denmark receive a price for a proposal for a sustainable development for greater Copenhagen on the inland Zealand in Denmark

A concept of bioregions that comes in as an important tool in Permaculture.

The crashes that is coming up – violent weather, floods, soil erosion, drought, deforestation, desertification, declining soil fertility, rising sea levels, etc. – disasters in the natural systems, are calling for the basic core of action in Permaculture.

To refute and prepare ourselves for those disastrous situations do we have to create situations where we in our smaller projects can establish a structure where we can rely on our shelter, food, fuel and security in settlement and social structure.

That would not be possible in small independent settlements, whatever beautiful and self sustained they are.

We have to, already now to start building up some robust bioregional networks in order to have the people, the knowledge and the contacts ready for action, organised geographically according to what areas can supply themselves with all basic resources, in preparedness for the case of our modern vulnerable supply-systems failing under one or more of the environmental crises threatening.

That's what we did in 1996 in the architectural competition, put out by 3 ministries, the ministry of environment and energy, ministry of housing and ministry of culture. The subject was a sustainable future for a greater western city – in this case Copenhagen and a smaller municipality within Copenhagen – Frederiksberg.

On the basis of the experiences we had in the Danish Permaculture group from projects within Copenhagen city and rural projects from its vicinities – did we develop a scheme for the whole Oeresund region as a Bioregion (the island Zealand with 10.000 km², and where Copenhagen are situated plus 30.000 km² in Scania in the southern part of Sweden. An area that until 1660 was a part of Denmark, and as that an original part of the Copenhagen Bioregion.

That gave us a total area of 40.000 km², where about 30% already are forest.

The scheme for which we got the price was the calculation to provide all basic resources for the 4 mill people who lived in that region. It meant planting 50 % more trees, mostly in multifunctional hedges and tree belts. The trees served all the Permaculture functions, but the amount was calculated as a base for sustainable harvest for the bio fuel, based on woodchips used in a newly developed Stirling engine for heat and electricity.

So the greater Oeresund area was mainly for the production of energy and building material, while the production of food and water could be provided within smaller areas, i.e. on Zealand for the 2 mill population on the island.

The following projects are projects developed since which could / would be involved in that whole scheme for bioregional sustainability in the world braking down into its fundamental parts.

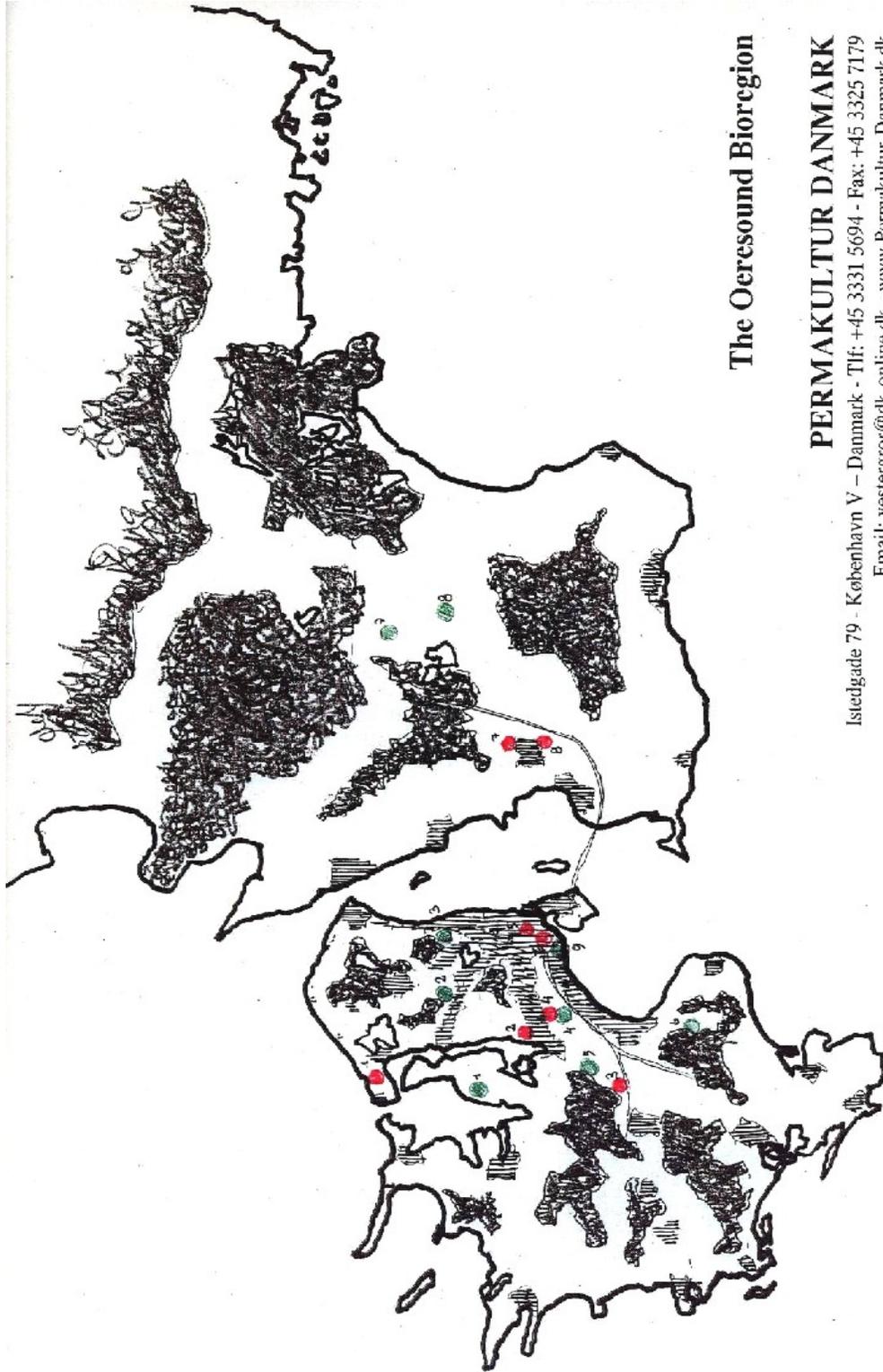
On the back you can see the different projects:

AGRICULTURE Organic and/or Permaculture (green)

- Svanholm 1 (Estate) – Hegnstrup 2 (farm) - Krogerup Avlsgård 3 (farm) – GuleReer 4 (4 ha PC project) – Skovlygård 5 (farm) – Brinkholm 6 (farm) – Höör 7 (forest garden) - Susanne Velander 8 (farm) - Valby Haven 9 (forest garden)

SETTLEMENTS Eco- / Urban- / Institutions (red)

- ØK village Torup 1 (Eco-village) – Munksøgård 2 Eco-village) – Hallingbjerg 3 (Eco-village) – GuleReer 4 (Eco-village) – Nørrebro, Mimergade, Nørrebro Park 5 (60.000 urban area) – Vesterbro, Kgs. Enghave 6 (50.00 urban area) – Solbyen 7 (Eco-village) - Sct. Hansgården 8 (kindergarten)



The Øresund Biorregion

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