

## Welcome to the MEG Newsletter 1/2013

*Editor*

The MEG Newsletter is under new management! Brendan has left us after a great couple of years and is now busy traveling through South-East Asia... needless to say, we're all jealous.

It's been a busy Winter Semester 2012/2013, which saw the welcoming of MEG8, yet another diverse (22 countries) and motivated group.



MEG6 received the "*Sonderpreis für herausragendes studentisches Engagement des Landes Baden-Württemberg*" for their Scientific Theater, transformed their theatrics into an e.V., and began working on grand plans for the future.

MEG8 discovered the (rather enjoyable) MEG-way-of-life through excursions to Frankfurt and Geneva, a teambuilding weekend in the seclusion of the Schauinsland snow, and the intensity of the rapid module succession.

MEG7's SOE was a hit with the local community – their mural was fully painted within hours and its back was equally filled by the end of the day.



The overall theme of this newsletter is "transitions". For all MEGs there is a constant transition happening, from living at home to living in Freiburg, from studying to working, from thinking about the world as an ordered space to seeing it as a discursive chaos that is ours for the taking.

Choosing "transitions" as a loose theme is equally a way of tipping one's hat to the challenges ahead and to our past, present and future role in shaping complex futures!

Your Editor,

Matthew  
(MEG8, France/U.S.A.)



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## “Is there life after MEG?”

*Michael Pregernig, Programme Director*

This is a question that, I guess, quite some MEG students ask themselves, especially as they come closer to graduation. The answers to this question vary. A first group of students, i.e. those taking a more ontological perspective, reply with a convicted “no”. “*Once a MEG, always a MEG*”, they proudly proclaim in alteration of the Marine Corps League’s motto. A second group, i.e. those who have made the MEG bubble their beloved home, reply with a timid “unfortunately yes”. They are afraid of parting with their MEG buddies and consequently find a bazillion reasons why they have to postpone the registration of their Master theses. Finally there is a third group whose answer is a doubtful “yes, but”. This is a group of students who are eager to get out into the “real world” in order to apply what they have learned in the MEG and to *shape.complex.futures* – but who are not sure where the organizations are which want their futures to be shaped. It is this third group to whom I would like to give some information today and, with that, hopefully bring some reassurance.

Though the most vivid picture of what it means to be a “MEG Graduate” could be given by means of the many colorful postcards and lively reports that we regularly receive from all over the world (Thanks for that, to all of you!), I want to share some more dry statistics with you today. A few weeks ago, Esther has done her regular update of our alumni/alumnae database and based on the many kind replies that she got we have now a very good picture of where our former students ended up.

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As of now, we have some 110 students who have graduated from the MEG program. From about 90% of those graduates we know where they are domiciled and how they earn their living at the moment.

As regards *regional spread*, we see both stability and dynamism: From the first six generations of MEGs, 17% are still in Freiburg, another 22% have stayed in Germany, 35% have returned to their home countries (Germans excluded), 7% have returned to their home regions whereas 19% have moved to a different region of the world.

As regards the jobs that MEGs hold, we see both predictable but also some surprising patterns. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of *organizational contexts* in which MEGs are currently working. The largest group is academia: Not surprisingly for a “young” study program like the MEG, almost two out of five graduates are (still) doing their PhD or work in a research institute. The second largest group is the private sector: Every fourth graduate works in a business company or a consultancy. The third largest group is the government sector: One out of five MEG alumni/ae works for an international or a national governmental organization. Close to the governmental sector we have the single largest employer for MEGs, which is GIZ, the German Agency for International Cooperation. Last but not least, one out of ten works in the NGO sector.

**Fig. 1: Graduates by organizational context**

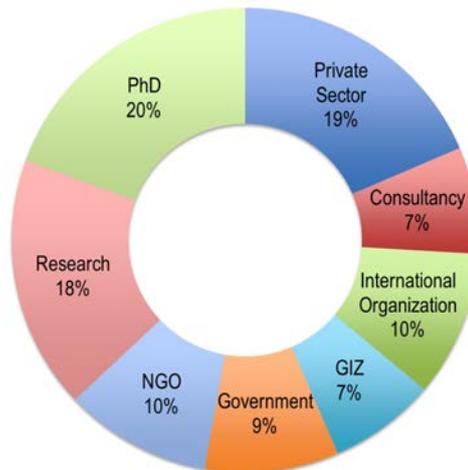
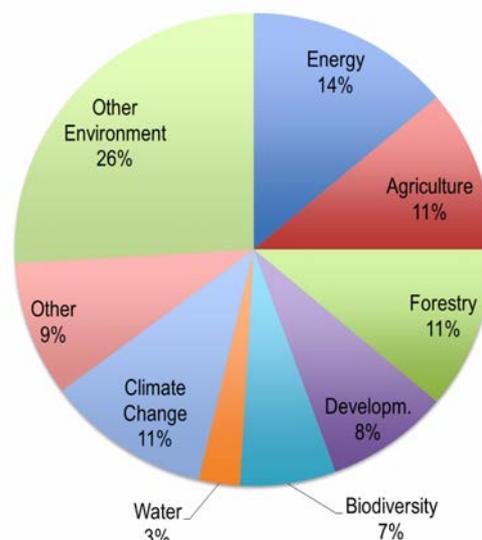


Figure 2 shows a breakdown along *subject area*. Fully in line with the MEG program’s institutional claim - “*Developing Leadership for Sustainable Environments*” - 90% of our graduates end up in the broader realm of environment and development, with the single largest sectors being energy, climate change, agriculture and forestry.

**Fig. 2: Graduates by policy fields**



So much for the dry statistics. Those who want to get a more vivid picture of some of our graduates are highly invited to check out the “Meet the Alumni/ae” section on the MEG webpage (<http://www.meg-uni-freiburg.de/134/>). On that page, some MEG alumni/ae are telling us what they are doing now and where, and they let us know how the MEG program helped them get where they are now.

*[PS: We would, of course, be happy to have more and new profiles in our “Meet the Alumni/ae” section. So, please, send us your profiles!]*

### News from the Faculty

After having reported on MEGs in the world, let me finally also share some news from the more immediate MEG universe here in Freiburg.

Since the beginning of this year, our Faculty has a new name. It is now called “*Faculty of Environment and Natural Resources*”, fittingly abbreviated FUN. The Faculty is now broken down into three larger Institutes: “Forest Sciences”, “Earth and Environmental Sciences”, as well as “Environmental Social Sciences and Geography”. As the new names indicate, the Faculty sees a certain shift of priorities away from the strong focus on forestry towards a broader profile in environmental science, including a strengthening of the environmental social sciences. Altogether, this reorganization and reorientation of the Faculty should strengthen the MEG as well.

Big changes have also happened in the MEG management team: After having worked in and for the MEG for more than two years, Leonora “Leo” Lorena has decided to quit her position as module coordinator because she got a wonderful opportunity at FAO in Rome (see her article below). We are happy and

sad about that at the same time. In the name of the whole management team, I would like to thank Leo for her tireless efforts. She was not only the “organizer” of the MEG, but also very much its “spirit-giver”. Leo, we will miss you!

The position of module coordinator will be filled by two new MEGs: Seirra (Mulcare) Römmermann (MEG2) and Bleta Arifi (MEG6). The two will introduce themselves in one of the next newsletters. Both can from now on be reached under the generic e-mail address: [MEG.Coordinator@ifp.uni-freiburg.de](mailto:MEG.Coordinator@ifp.uni-freiburg.de). Seirra, Bleta, welcome aboard!

## Farewell to Leo

*Editor*

It’s official, Leo has left us for the sunny skies of Rome. Better than a long-winded farewell, here are the lyrics to very special song (re)written just for her...



**Ain’t no sunshine when you’re gone**

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It's not fun when you're away.  
Ain't no sunshine when you're gone  
And you're maybe gone for long

Anyway you go away.

You brought great spirits to the MEGs,  
Emily: In times of stress and in despair,  
You cheered them up and gave them hope,  
But now they have to fight alone,  
As you head away for Rome.

All: For Rome, for Rome, for Rome, for Rome  
For Rome, FOR ROME

Hey, I oughtta leave young thing alone  
But ain't no sunshine when you're gone

Wonder if you'll like your job,  
Philipp: And get fancy things to do,

Wonder if you'll find new friends,  
Who take you out for drinks and dance,  
Make you party, make you play.

We hope you get a gracious boss,

Michael: One who likes the impro fix,  
Or whose nerves are made of steel,  
And who still bakes you a cake,  
Or even a Zabajone[e].

Ain't no gossip without you  
Esther: How to know what's going on?  
New love, fights, and drama, too  
No more news we get from you  
Now that you found a new home

All: New home, new home, new home, new home  
New home, NEW HOME

Hey, I oughtta leave young thing alone  
But ain't no sunshine when you're gone

All: Ain't no sunshine when you're gone  
It's not fun when you're away.  
Ain't no sunshine when you're gone

And you're maybe gone for long  
It's so sad that you go away.

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MEG-Mafia. The reason for this is because many of us have worked (MEG2 Sun-Ae, MEG3 Annie & Samira, MEG4 Ramy, MEG5 Diego & Andrea) or are still working here (MEG3 Alba – also known as the Godmother –, Prit – teleworking -, and me).

THANK YOU FOR ALL THE WONDERFUL SURVIVAL TIPS, GIFTS & WISHES.

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## Farewell from Leo

Leo, ex-MEG Module Coordinator

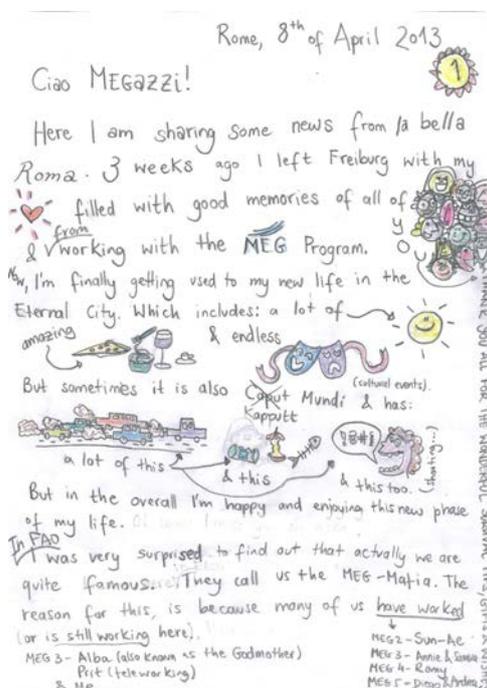
Rome, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013

Ciao MEGAZZI!

Here I am sharing some news from la bella Roma. 3 weeks ago I left Freiburg with my (heart) filled with good memories of all of you & from working with the MEG Program.

Now I'm finally getting used to my new life in the eternal city. Which includes: a lot of (sun), amazing (pizza), and endless (cultural events). But sometimes it is also Kaputt Mundi & has a lot of (traffic) & (trash) & (shouting). But overall I'm happy and enjoying this new phase of my life.

In FAO, I was surprised to find out that we are actually quite famous. They call us the



In my first week of FAO, I felt like I was in the hotspot of Environmental Governance. This is more or less what happened:

- 18<sup>th</sup> March: Dilma Rousseff was here to discuss the fight against hunger
- 19<sup>th</sup> March: my first day at work with red carpet at the entrance (ok it was for the other guys)
- 20<sup>th</sup> March: Enrique Pena Nieto was here to discuss poverty reduction & anti-hunger efforts.

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- 21<sup>st</sup> March: International day of Forests (big conference)
- 22<sup>nd</sup> March: World water day

## Is going back to school all it's made out to be?

Fadzai, MEG8 Zimbabwe

Now things have cooled down a bit and I can focus on my work. I'm part of the Water Unit and I'm currently writing a chapter on water resources in Arab countries. It is very interesting & I'm learning a lot.

Now I have to finish. Please don't forget that I miss you all and I hope that MEG8 had a great first day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester & that MEG7 is enjoying their thesis period. I also wish all fun & luck to Bleta & Sierra in their new jobs as MEG Module Coordinators.

Sunny hugs,

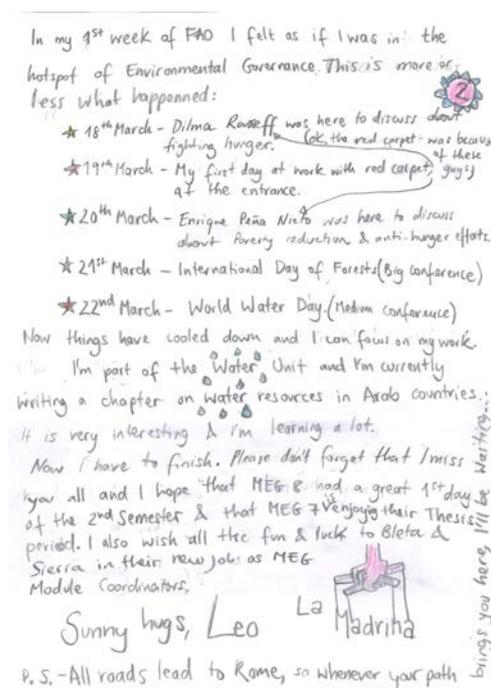
Leo

P.S. All roads lead to Rome, so whenever your path brings you here, I'll be waiting...

After a certain age and life experiences, the decision to return to full-time tertiary studies (or attempt them for the first time) is not necessarily a simple or casual one. For some, the anticipated improvements in career prospects make the challenges and the risks worthwhile. For others, it is the belief in a long-held dream (e.g. starting or growing a business) that pushes them to bolster their skills and knowledge as far as possible.

Whatever the motivation, and despite the best intentions, know that your resolve will be tested. You may believe that because you are older and wiser than when you obtained your first degree or qualification, you have every reason to be confident: you are more mature and resilient; you bring valuable real-world skills and knowledge; you are less naïve and more pragmatic; you are more focused; you can manage yourself and do not need to be 'babied'; the list could go on. But have you thought about what you really need to survive and thrive in the university environment?

In an environment where your classmates span a wide range of ages and come from different professional and cultural backgrounds, it may be disconcerting to find that you feel alienated and isolated. Worse, you are no longer a major power broker or even someone worth acknowledging and respecting. Instead, you are one of many thousands of jostling students on the university campus, forced to endure indignities such as competing for even the smallest scraps of influence and status, dealing with an unyielding and sometimes illogical university administrative



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bureaucracy, wrestling with the thousand-year-old photocopying machine in the library, and eating the dodgy but cheap food at the cafeteria.

But it doesn't end there. Regardless of how progressive and liberal a university might try to position itself as, grades still matter. When was the last time your older and supposedly superior brain was forced to learn and retain vast swathes of information, with computer-like precision? When was the last time you had a formal exam which forced you to operate under intense time pressure and other stresses normally absent from the working world?



When was the last time you experienced the anxiety of sharing information on how you performed on that last assignment/test/exam, knowing your response will elicit certain perceptions and judgments of you? And then there is the disappointing possibility that depending on what you are studying and where, your professional experience may count for nothing in a grading system that favours theory and the abstract over realistic and less pedantic problem-solving.

Don't kid yourself – all of these things matter in shaping the usefulness and impact of your back-to-school adventure. Not least having the physical and emotional energy required to keep up with the world of full-time studies and whatever other additional responsibilities one might have outside the classroom.

You have been warned...



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## Rio+20 and its many roads

Paula, MEG8 Brazil

My first contact with both the host city of Rio+20 and the official venue for the event were far from welcoming. I was sent to Rio de Janeiro a week before the conference and was to go to RioCentro (the official venue) to evaluate logistical aspects for our delegation.

Taking a cab from the city centre, I naively thought it wouldn't take too long to get there and, also naively, didn't check to see if the meter was on. After some 30 minutes I decided to take a look at my phone's GPS just to realize that I still had half way to go. Once we finally got there I thought I could dismiss that taxi and get another one after I finished the "analysis of the terrain". As it turns out, the venue was a work in progress: the tents were still being assembled and it looked just like a military camp – there were 5 or 6 soldiers every 2km. Therefore, the place was deserted and there was no other taxi for me to take. Another long ride with the same driver, this time he had the taximeter on.

To contextualize the situation, RioCentro is 37km away from the city centre. In local parameters, it would be comparable to the distance between Freiburg and Müllheim. The only thing is that in Rio those 37km are inside a metropolis with local roads and lower speed limits than a German highway. Since Barra da Tijuca is mostly a residential area, there is a lot of pendular traffic as well.

The conference participants dealt with this distance everyday, since most of them (including delegation chiefs, high authorities and presidents) were staying in the city centre, or at least in the south of the city. There is no public transport for an event that big and therefore the government made available

free bus shuttles for the participants to have a chance to get out of the venue without paying exorbitant taxi fares – although some still did. Nonetheless, after a full day of workshops, networking, conferences, launching events, meetings and too much information, the bus shuttle still took about an hour and a half to get to the south of the city, crossing narrow mountain streets that are home to a big part of Rio's population – the favelas.

After a couple of days, it became clear that it would be impossible to attend different events in the city centre and in RioCentro in the same day. So we had a lot of re-scheduling to do. And that was the reality for most organization's representatives.

Very close to the city centre, though, another big conference was being held. Much different from the one at RioCentro: *The People's Summit* took place at Aterro do Flamengo, a nice area in the south of the city, facing the beach and the "Pao de Açucar", one of its most famous touristic places. The tents that were built by the small independent organizations, as well as by medium to large NGOs and by communities and indigenous people, didn't have air conditioning, carpets or nice and comfortable chairs. The main plenary was just a big tent and people sat down wherever they found a place comfortable and protected from the sun. That also prevented an overwhelming sea of suits that were the uniform in RioCentro.

During the Rio+20 I had the opportunity to attend different events in both "sides", and so did many of my colleagues that worked for national and international organizations and governments. It was clear, though, the different roles that each place had. It was also clear the two different tones that were used in both scenarios – the same speaker would have different tones when speaking in RioCentro or in the Aterro venue. The People's

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Summit had a more informal dynamic. During the weekend you could see the local population visiting the tents, buying artefacts from the communities that were selling them there, and also taking part in some of the lectures, at least for as long as they could endure the heat. It was, after all, a public place, no IDs required.



Photo: Guardian.co.uk

It became very clear too that the outcomes of the two summits would be diverging. As we approached the final days, a cloud started to form above our heads. The hope that those two events, taking place in the same city, with the same background, could speak the same language was fading. As they came to an end, the results are as we know today: *The Final Declaration of the People's Summit* denies the Green Economy concept which is the pillar for the Rio+20 official final document: *The Future We Want*.

Although the outcomes of both events demand similar things from governments and organizations, they were not able to come to an agreement, to speak the same language, to translate their thoughts towards a common goal: a common future. Somehow the roads still do not connect, and even recognizing that some bridges might have already shortened the way, there are still many roads to be built in the future.

## From green debating to FREG slamming

*Cameron, MEG7 U.K.*

It's been 18 months into the MEG programme now, and I wish I could say that I was finished with classes but I still have 3 more modules for various reasons! Luckily the next generation of FREGs (FEM, REM and MEGs) have taken over the running of FREG Slam. Not that I can complain too much. MEG didn't allow much time to hold many slams, we managed only about 3 in a period of 10 months. However, these 3 slams were by and large very entertaining. From Moritz's infamous "Chicken chicken chicken" warm-up act to Lukas Egger's excellent presentation of a couple of months back, there were plenty of laughs to be had as well as interesting discussions, not to mention a few beers shared with students from the faculty.

It was for exactly these reasons that FREG slam was established. After having attempted a couple of 'green debating' style evenings at the faculty it was obvious that the confrontational, aggressive style of British debating that I was used to was perhaps not too popular. I had really loved debating as an undergraduate so I was somewhat disappointed that I wasn't able to pursue this interest as a masters student. I wanted to have a forum where we could discuss these important environmental issues properly – as there wasn't enough time in class to really do this – as well as just have a kind of regular social event where we could get to know students from the other programmes (the social element of debating was also something I missed). I also knew that a lot of other students felt the same way about this.

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After taking part in a science slam in Freiburg I realised that this was a format that might serve these aims better. The format was fun as well as interesting. Basically there are a number of presenters and there are only two rules – one is that each has 10 only minutes to present and the other is that the presentation be as entertaining as possible! In the end the audience votes for the winner. We adopted this format but tweaked it a bit. First, there was to be no competition – that would involve too much unnecessary pressure. Second, we had to include time to discuss the presentation itself. Voila, FREG Slam was born.

We had a total of 4 presenters over the 3 Slams. Miriam from the FEMs, and Martin, Matt and Lukas from the REMS. All did a fantastic job which just served to shame us MEGs even further for failing to do a single presentation! Presentation topics included the impacts of climate change on forests in Canada, the Rebound Effect, how to fight against oil companies and what's wrong with the world and what we can do about it! It was thanks to these presenters that the evenings went so well and also thanks to all the people who came, asked questions, discussed and drank!

I would have liked there to have been more Slams, but the demands of MEG are sometimes too much. It's great that the next generation are taking over and I eagerly await the next Slam without having to lift a finger! Hopefully there will even be a MEG giving a presentation. Now that would be perfect.

## Meeting the greats: Impressions from the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Convention of Environmental Laureates

*Editor*

A group of MEG students took part in the 2nd International Convention of Environmental Laureates in Freiburg, that brought together over 80 environmental prize winners to prepare a declaration for a sustainable future.

The event, co-sponsored by the Club of Rome, included public lectures from illustrious environmentalists Ernst Weizsäcker, Ashok Khosla, Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Klaus Töpfer and Jørgen Randers.

MEG students shined during the conference's final day, when laureates, university students and local high-school pupils came together for roundtables to discuss a range of topics (e.g. energy, work, finance, mobility) within the framework of limits to growth.

Here are some impressions from the MEGs who participated:

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*Ferhad (MEG8, Indonesia)*

"I have gained lots of new experiences from the conference, especially from the roundtable. I was participating in the "finance and money" discussion, where we reflected on the problems with the current financial system, how this sector can best serve the goals of society and how it can better be regulated."



*János (MEG8, Germany)*

"To have the chance to discuss topics in the roundtables showed me again the different views of environmental laureates who agree on common principles but have very different suggestions to bring them into practice. Especially having environmental laureates from practice and scientific background in one spot added important value to the event."



*Naho (MEG8, Japan)*

"Solutions must come from a completely new way of thinking." Exchanging opinions with passionate laureates, I realized I myself was still constrained by the traditional growth paradigm, which is, in reality, deeply rooted in our society.

After inspirational conversations with laureates, my next questions are: how can we break through the traditional norms? Who would be the key player and the important tool to convince current institutions to accept a change? I promise myself to be a part of solution and create an innovative future.

## 2012: the end of the world after all?

*Philipp, MEG8 Germany*

'Survival pods' built by a Chinese inventor, underground bunkers developed to safeguard their Italian owners and a skyrocketing interest in one-way tickets to "Apocalypse safe havens". Still sounds familiar? Leaving the doomsday believers somewhat disappointed, the 21 December passed by serenely. We dodged the bullet – or did we?

### Biodiversity pushed towards extinction

Let us start with a 2012 tragedy, rather insignificant at first blush. The rarest animal in the world is no more. Lonesome George, the last of the Pinta Island tortoises, was found dead in June. However, this case is symptomatic for the loss of our species richness worldwide. Megafauna, such as Bluefin tuna and rhinos, continue being pushed towards extinction, bird and insect numbers to plunge and coral reefs to retreat.

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Lonesome George (Wikipedia Commons)

Nevertheless, humans thrived – at least their number, with 7.063 billion individuals at the end of 2012. In April the Royal Society forewarned in a significant report that world population needs to be steadied quickly and high consumption in rich countries rapidly reduced to avoid a downward spiral of economic and environmental harms.

### **A new era of climate change**

Another disaster, the Mayas did not see coming, hit us in 2012 with a slam. Parts of the planet have seen levels of carbon dioxide rise above 400 parts per million (ppm) for the first time. Although it is largely symbolic, the milestone is an unmistakable aide-mémoire of humanity's powerful influence on the atmosphere, increasing the greenhouse gas way beyond the pre-industrial concentration of 280 ppm.

Call it catastrophe, call it transition, a new era has truly begun in 2012. Global climatic change left the grey shades of academic ivory towers and political disputes, and provided a foretaste to what this era might hold.

The worst drought in 60 years, covering two thirds of the US and costing at least \$ 150 billion was quickly followed by the opposite extreme: Hurricane Sandy known as one of the worst tragedies to occur in New York

City. A similarly gloomy reminder was the recent flood in Metro Manila caused by a tropical storm that swept through the Philippines in September leaving 80% of the city underwater.

### **A deep concern in place of action**

Many researchers are connecting the dots between these extreme weather trends and climate change; dots that cannot easily be wiped away anymore, as 2012 showed.

The unwillingness and incapability to act is very global. Some argue that in 2012 governments turned their backs on the living planet, validating that no persistent problem, however severe, will take priority over an immediate concern, however trivial. The world leaders' apathy cumulated in the Rio Earth Summit in June, where some of the world's most powerful governments – the US, the UK, Germany and Russia – did not even take the trouble to show their faces.

### **From apocalypticism to realistic solutions**

So far 2012's account suggests many signs of the end of the natural world indeed, but gives no hints for a new political era of adequate action whatsoever. So are we definitely doomed, with human society's expiry date just postponed to 21 December plus X?

This view might be convenient as it serves the psychological phenomenon of apocalypticism, encapsulating the understandable desire for easy explanations to an increasingly complex world and the freedom from any moral imperatives, admonishing us to act responsibly.

A more apt answer to our societies' problems seems a realistic view on the world, reflecting success stories and displaying roadmaps, scenarios and strategies to a sustainable future.

For instance solar panels became the cheapest energy source in parts of the tropics, highlighting one very feasible remedy for climate change. Or take the BP oil spill aftermath; the company has to pay \$4.5 billion, the biggest corporate criminal penalty in U.S. history.

Also in the frustratingly cumbersome quagmire of international environmental negotiations, there is a bright side. One example is the severe global problem of overfishing, where the European Commission reforms passed this year as the major shake-up of the common fisheries policy for decades.

#### **If there is hope, it lies with the people**

Opinion polls prove that voters do not support their governments' inaction. Even a majority of Conservatives believe that the UK should generate most of its electricity from renewables by 2030. The real conundrum is that many of those concerned are not prepared to act on their beliefs.

To make best use of the reprieve from 2012's apocalypse, we must translate these inactive worries into a mass mobilization. Groups such as 350.org show how it might be done. Governments care only as much as their citizens force them to care.

## **MEG in Geneva over the years**

Editor

The annual trip to Geneva has become quite the tradition, which provides us with an occasion to have a look at some of the pictures from the past five years!



2009



2010



2011

Imprint

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2012



2013

## On the side

*Editor*

### MEG & GIZ

After the excursion to Frankfurt in November, a group of MEG8 students worked with GIZ on a policy brief aiming to stem wildlife crime. GIZ responded very positively and work is due to continue in the spring.

Philipp (MEG8, Germany) is also working for the GIZ funded *Biodiversity and Climate*

**SHAPE. COMPLEX. FUTURES.**

*Change Project*, currently being implemented by the Asean Center for Biodiversity in the Philippines. More information at: [GreenChallengeAccepted.wordpress.com](http://GreenChallengeAccepted.wordpress.com)

### MEG & ILO

Syahrina (MEG 8, Indonesia) is preparing a paper on Forest Certification in Indonesia for Peter Poschen (ILO)

### MEG & Öko-Institut

Matthew (MEG8, France) is working with Öko-Institut on a sustainability transitions research project for the German government.

### MEG & Shale Gas

Paula, James, János and Matthew (MEG8, Brazil, U.S.A., Germany, France) are working with Profs. Shannon and Meidinger on issues related to shale gas. They have been taking part in a weekly colloquium at SUNY Buffalo and hope to publish an article.

### MEG & DAAD

Syahrina (MEG8, Indonesia) will be representing MEG at the DAAD conference on "Change agents – faces of change" on 18 of June in Heidelberg. The event will be attended by the Federal Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development and the President of the DAAD.

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