

## WHY WE NEED TO BUILD A PLANETARY SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Donata Francescato\*

*The aim of this position paper is to argue that after COVID-19, we have a terrific opportunity to develop a planetary sense of community to confront systemic problems such as climate change, racism, sexism, socioeconomic and power disparities. This tangle of different crises is making both the earth and us human sick and spreading huge amounts of physical, psychological and political pain. Only if we all become more aware of the interconnections between the crisis, each of us prioritizes, and all the others, then we have a better chance to begin to develop a planetary sense of community.*

**Keywords:** *sense of community, climate change*

### 1. Introduction

This perspective paper aims to argue that after COVID-19, we have a great opportunity as community psychologists to help develop a planetary sense of community, which will enable us to confront the systemic problems of climate change, racism, sexism, socio-economic and power disparities. This combination of different crises makes both the earth and humans sick, spreading intense physical, psychological, and political pain. Only if we all become more aware of the interconnections between the specific crises each of us prioritizes, and all the others, will we have a better chance to develop a planetary sense of community.

In this article, I first describe how in different fields researchers have been involved in formulating concepts that underline the need to increase our awareness of belonging to the planet earth and develop a planetary sense of community. Second, I document how climate change has made this effort an urgent priority. Third, I discuss why it is essential to elect politicians who will help us make the complex cultural, economic, and social transitions required; and support global youth movements like Fridays for Future. In the fourth section, I describe what contributions community psychologists could make as professionals and researchers to fight climate warming. In the conclusions, I invite community psychologists to become climate change activists and network with other protest movements.

I try to write as a CP academic in pursuit of knowledge; as a CP professional wanting to enact practical actions to tackle social problems; and as a CP activist aiming to arouse a sense of urgency and emotional involvement. To become an activist is essential now when we still have a few years to avoid the worst scenario.

As an activist of Fridays for Future since February 2019, shortly after Greta Thunberg launched her worldwide movement, I have come to respect and admire these very young people who devote so much of their time to fight for climate change. I had underestimated how much damage environmental emergencies were doing to the poorest of the planet. For decades my priorities centered on fighting class and gender differences, which I became aware of in my childhood, living

---

\* Former professor, La Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

---

in a small town. My family lived in a cramped flat of a lower-class condominium, for which we paid rent to a nobleman, who lived in a castle with a large private park. He did not provide us renters, even with indoor plumbing. My first act of protest was to refuse to write a Christmas card to the Marquis, ending with the traditional phrase: "I pay my respects," because he did not deserve our respect. I explained to my parents, I would send wishes for Christmas, but no respects. When the Marquis met my father, he told him, what a pity it was that I wasn't a male, because, with my quick wit, I might have gone to the university and become a good lawyer. And my father agreed with him, chuckling that to have girls pursue higher education was like throwing gold into a well. I heard their conversation and silently swore that I would take not just one, but three university degrees: two for my grandmother and my mother who loved to study, but were forced to stop after elementary school, and one for me. I kept my promise, and I have been studying and protesting ever since, as a feminist and a community psychologist in a clinical psychology department. When two years ago, I became an activist of Fridays For Future; I realized that I had concentrated my energies in solving humans' problems, neglecting the degradation of the natural environment<sup>1</sup>.

Therefore, this paper aims to stimulate community psychologists to become more deeply involved as academics, professionals, and political activists in fighting climate warming.

## **2. Four movements testifying the need for a planetary sense of community**

The concept of planetary sense of community which I put forward in this paper, has three main components: feeling an affective sense of belonging to the planet earth, considering oneself primarily a citizen of the world and having a spiritual or ethical responsibility to protect the planet earth and all its living creatures. It borrows some concepts from the construct of sense of community, developed by Sarason (1974), McMillan and Chavis (1986), and Cicognani and colleagues (2012), such as membership, influence, shared emotional connection and support, but it differs in the space that the community occupies, from the local-territorial to the planet earth. Community is not identified as a specific geographic place, because the world-as-a-whole has become a place in its own right. A second important difference is in the kind of solidarity (intergenerational and sublime) that a planetary community requires. Main social processes are both creating a planetary sense of community and nationalist and localist movements. This transformation is tortuous and conflictful, because the centrifugal forces drawing the world together also generate counteracting forces pushing it apart. The actions of integrating trigger the reactions of fragmentation, geopolitical activism provokes national isolationism, and economic globalization stimulates localist backlash (Falk, 1994).

Many authors in different fields in the last decades have maintained that large social processes are creating a planetary community. The first use, to my knowledge, of the exact words "planetary sense of community" appears in the Nasa site: "A mission to our nearest neighbor providing the best opportunity for collaboration will highlight our common interests and provide a planetary sense of community" (NASA, 2013). However, many authors in different fields such as environmental science, international law, citizenship, and religion have in the last decades pointed to the need of a planetary sense of community to tackle global complex problems. I will briefly examine their contributions.

---

<sup>1</sup> For further positioning information, see Wikipedia (Donata Francescato) and [www.donatafrancescato.it](http://www.donatafrancescato.it).

---

## 2.1 *The environmental movement of movements*

Ecologists have been the first to attempt to create a planetary awareness of the need to protect the natural environment and understand that the battle for a sustainable planet had to be fought uniting movements against racism, sexism, power, and economic oppression. It has taken them decades to promote their vision.

The first UN Conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm in 1972, with 113 countries and 600 NGOs attending. The Declaration of the Conference stated that every human has the right to enjoy a clean and healthy environment. With this right, however, comes the responsibility to preserve the environment for future generations. In the same year, Dennis and Donella Meadows of MIT wrote the *Limits to Growth* with support from the Club of Rome. With the use of a Systems Dynamics model, the book analyzes why we cannot have unlimited growth on a planet with finite resources. It was translated in 27 languages and sold 12 million copies. This was one of the first models of the global community. After the *Limits to Growth*, numerous global models and studies were realized by this organization of leading scientists and ex-politicians. This led up to the 1987 UN Brundtland Commission Report, which recognized that poverty reduction, gender equity, and wealth redistribution was crucial to formulating strategies for environmental conservation. They also realized that environmental limits to economic growth in developed and developing societies existed. The report “Our Common Future” called for a “sustainable development” that meets the needs of the present without compromising future generations’ ability to meet their own needs (UN, 1987).

The 1992 Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro was the direct result of the Brundtland Commission. It brought together 168 nations, 7000 NGOs, 8000 journalists, and thousands of activists. The Summit produced the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Statement of Forest Principles, and Agenda 21. The Earth Summit also led to the establishment of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and most importantly, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Global concern for the environment had grown in numbers and breadth of issues involved.

There were then a series of protests when members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) convened in Seattle, Washington, on November 30, 1999. The protest organizers included a great variety of groups: unions worried about competition from foreign labor, environmentalists concerned about the outsourcing of polluting activities, consumer protection groups preoccupied about unsafe imports, labor rights groups worried about bad working conditions in other countries, and leftists expressing their anger at capitalism (Smith, 2014). This prompted ecologist participants to characterize the situation as a movement of movements (Francescato et al., 2002).

The advent of the Internet and social media allowed ecologists to network worldwide and organize global face to face meetings with activists’ groups that had different specific goals such as defending indigenous rights, fighting racial gender oppression, and eliminating hunger. In the Third Millennium, a new strategy began to emerge that tries to respond to the complex problems with a new approach summarized in the slogan “think globally and respond locally”.

This was followed by the Earth Summits of 2002 and 2012. A significant achievement of the 2012 summit was the agreement not to carry out any activities on indigenous peoples’ lands that would cause environmental degradation, or that would be culturally inappropriate. The Summit culminated in finalizing the non-binding document, “The World We Want”, which opens with: “We the Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives, having met at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to June 22, 2012, with the full participation of civil society, renew our

---

commitment to sustainable development and to ensuring the promotion of an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for our planet and for present and future generations" (UN, 2012 p. 1).

At COP 21 in Paris, on December 12, 2015, 197 parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) reached a landmark agreement to combat climate change and to accelerate and intensify the actions and investments needed for a sustainable low carbon future. (UNFCCC, 2015). The European Union is legislating their European Green Deal, which plans investments in the order of one trillion Euros (EU, 2020a). However, in 2016, Trump decided to withdraw from the Paris Agreement to pursue the interests of the Big Oil and his choice empowered right-wing conservative movements in various parts of the world, which fostered nationalism and opposed the planetary community ideal proposed by ecologists.

This has been a severe setback in promoting an ecological planetary sense of community, based on the notion that the planet earth is our common home. However, the environmental movement has found new allies among the foremost religious leaders of the world. They have developed similar perspectives that building a planetary sense of community requires confronting together the systemic problems of climate change, racism, sexism, socio-economic, and power disparities that are strongly interconnected.

## **2.2 *Religious and spiritual viewpoints on taking care of Mother Earth***

Mary Evelyn Tucker, interviewed by Cohn (2011), states that she has long believed that science and policy alone are not enough to deal with the Earth's most pressing environmental challenges. What's also needed, she says, is a spiritual or religious framework for valuing the natural world, a sense that there is something here that's larger than us, something that's given birth to all life forms and sustains us... Over the last 15 to 20 years, religion and ecology have grown as an academic field, but also as a force in the larger society. So many colleges across the country now have courses in religion and ecology, certainly in environmental ethics and so on. And the religious communities — Judaism, Christianity, Islam — are moving forward as well. Each religion is developing its own language around this ethical responsibility — *stewardship* for the Earth is more in the Jewish and Christian traditions, *trusteeship* for the Earth in the Islamic tradition. *Care for creation* is what the evangelicals like to use" (Cohn, 2011, pp. 1-3).

In 1986, the first historic meeting, between the top representatives of the world's five major religions and the largest environmental organizations was held in Assisi. A network, ARC (Alliance of Religions and Conservation) was established in 1995, with the support of eleven faiths. ARC promoted hundreds of projects for the protection of nature and the environment in dozens of countries.

In June 2015, the papal encyclical, *Laudato Si*, was launched. For the first time, an encyclical was entirely dedicated to integral ecology, which brings together the economic, social, environmental, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of the ecological issue - presented as a vision of the world. Pope Francis declares: "in this Encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home". The integration of the indigenous cosmovision, based on the sacredness of Mother Earth, into the *Sancta Sanctorum* of Christian theology was decisive. As a practical consequence, the Church chose to take sides with the indigenous communities in defense of the forest, their cultural identity, and their very survival (Francescato, 2018).

Among the first to respond to the encyclical were authoritative exponents of Islam. On August 18, 2015, they gathered in Istanbul and released a detailed document, mainly based on quotations

---

from the Koran, in which the link between religions and environmental protection was highlighted. The Istanbul declaration states that: "We are in danger of ending life as we know it on our planet... This current rate of climate change cannot be sustained, and the earth's fine equilibrium (mīzān) may soon be lost... What will future generations say of us, who leave them a degraded planet as our legacy?" (Neslen, 2015, p.1).

Inspired by the contents of *Laudato Si*, in 2017, a cultural and educational initiative was launched by numerous Pontifical Universities to establish a Joint Diploma in Integral Ecology. Also, other ecological organizations have been formed such as the Global Catholic Movement and the Federation of International Christian Volunteer Organizations. A campaign, called Faith in Finance, aims to define guidelines so that the various faiths can invest their financial resources in Faith Consistent Investments. They are working with ARC and with financial organizations such as the Swiss Impact Investment Association and Triple Bottom Line Investment (Francescato, 2018)

On September 1, 2020, for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, Pope Francis made a specific appeal regarding the environment and the current situation. "A Jubilee is a time to restore the original harmony of creation and to heal strained human relationships. It invites us to re-establish equitable societal relationships, restoring their freedom and goods to all and forgiving one another's debts. We should not forget the historical exploitation of the global South that has created an enormous ecological debt, due mainly to resource plundering and excessive use of common environmental space for waste disposal. It is a time for restorative justice. In this context, I repeat my call for the cancellation of the debt of the most vulnerable countries, in recognition of the severe impacts of the medical, social, and economic crises they face as a result of COVID-19... Climate restoration is of utmost importance, since we are in the midst of a climate emergency. We are running out of time, as our children and young people have reminded us. We need to do everything in our capacity to limit global average temperature rise under the threshold of 1.5°C enshrined in the Paris Climate Agreement, for going beyond that will prove catastrophic, especially for poor communities around the world. We need to stand up for intra-generational and inter-generational solidarity at this critical moment" (Pope Francis, 2020, p. 1).

A global spiritual and religious movement underlines that we need to develop an intra-generational and inter-generational solidarity, that is one of the critical elements that enhances a planetary sense of community. Religious and ecological movements mostly agree on their planetary healing goals and receive crucial support from ecological international law.

### **2.3 *Ecological international law***

International ecological law experts consider their field's growth as part of a larger world of social processes that comprehends "all the inter-penetrating and inter-stimulating communities on the planet. In the aggregate, these lesser communities comprise a planetary community. They use the expression 'world community' not in a metaphoric or wistfully aspirational sense, but as a descriptive term. 'Community' designates interactions in which inter-determination or interdependence in the shaping and sharing of all values attain an intensity at which participants in pursuit of their own objectives must regularly take account of the activities and demands of others" (McDougal et al., 1988, p.1).

Community can be conflictful, but what counts most is the perception of the interdependence of community processes, that motivates participants to individuate and pursue common interests. A planetary sense of community probably is strengthened when these processes occur: "A

---

community does not presuppose that its members operate with reciprocally amiable perspectives. Certainly, large numbers of the world's population view their counterparts with fear and, in many instances, with hatred. Nor does the community assume that all participants operate with overt recognition of community. Indeed, many members of the world community, as of less inclusive communities, betray little understanding of the impact their behavior has on others and that of others has on them. There is, thus, no necessary correlation between the facts of inter-determination and the perception of that inter-determination, including a recognition of the necessity for the clarification of common interest. When community as a fact is more clearly perceived, the observer is more likely to find that participants actively seek to clarify common interests with other community members and make more explicit demands for the establishment or improvement of authoritative decision processes. It is the perception of interdependence in community process that leads participants to appreciate the relevance of pursuing common interests and motivates them to clarify it" (McDougal et al., 1988, p.1).

Perceiving the world community as a fact means that one has to consider pursuing one's objectives, taking into account others' activities and demands, regardless of my feelings towards them. The planetary sense of community can have negative or positive affective components, as has been found in the traditional local sense of community when you can have a strong sense of belonging to a place but experience ambivalent or negative feelings about it (Arcidiacono et al., 2007).

The Ecological Law and Governance Association (ELGA) was created in 2017 in Siena, ELGA supporters identify the roots of the ecological crisis in the failure of environmental law, unable to curb the planet's degradation and protect its citizens. They demand to reconsider the foundations of law and environmental governance, proposing a perspective that is no longer anthropocentric but 'eco-centric' and places ecological integrity as the basis of law, overturning the principle of human domination over nature (ELGA, 2020a). The Siena Declaration, clearly states that this new framework for law and governance promotes the entire Earth, the ecological whole, in decision-making. ELGA has also launched a laboratory for the creation of new legal models of environmental protection and territorial governance from an ecological perspective and the rapid dissemination of emerging best practices in different countries (ELGA, 2020b).

In Europe, the Supreme Court of the Netherlands ordered the government to cut the nation's greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent from 1990 levels by the end of 2020. It was the first time a country has been required by its courts to take action against climate change. Because of climate change, "the lives, wellbeing and living circumstances of many people around the world, including in the Netherlands, are being threatened", Kees Streefkerk, the chief justice said in the decision... Michael Gerrard, director of the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law at Columbia University, said the decision was groundbreaking. There have been 1,442 climate lawsuits around the world... "This is the strongest decision ever. The Dutch Supreme Court upheld the first court order anywhere directing a country to slash its greenhouse gas emissions" (Schwartz, 2019, p.1). In France, the campaign "L'Affaire du Siècle" is spreading, supported by a petition signed to date by over two million citizens and promoted by Notre affaire a Tous, Fondation Nicolas Hulot pour la Nature et l'Homme, Greenpeace France, and Oxfam France. They filed legal actions against the French government for not respecting obligations for mitigating climate change and protecting the lives and rights of citizens and their territories (Carlton, 2019).

In the USA, there are more than 1,200 lawsuits brought by citizens or organizations against the government, charged of failing to keep faith with the commitments to reduce climate warming and

---

environmental degradation. One of the most famous cases, still pending, involves 21 children who, in 2015, denounced the US government for inaction in climate change policies.

Mobilization is also spreading in countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Brazil, which have Constitutions recognizing the rights of Mother Earth and indigenous people, at least in words. However, governments often go in the opposite direction, allowing the looting of resources and rampant deforestation, causing irreversible damage to the environment as in the Amazon. Recently, however, twenty-five young Colombians obtained from the Supreme Court recognition of the need for the government to act with more determination against deforestation and stop climate change.

An essential tool that has been developed is the environmental justice atlas (EJ Atlas), which documents and catalogs worldwide social conflict around environmental issues. “Across the world communities are struggling to defend their land, air, water, forests, and their livelihoods from damaging projects and extractive activities with heavy environmental and social impacts: mining, dams, tree plantations, fracking, gas flaring, incinerators. The EJ Atlas collects these stories of communities struggling for environmental justice from around the entire world. It aims to make these mobilizations more visible, highlight claims and testimonies, and make a case for true corporate and state accountability for the injustices inflicted through their activities. It also attempts to serve as a virtual space for those working on EJ issues to get information, find other groups working on related issues, and increase the visibility of environmental conflicts” (EJ Atlas, 2020, p.1).

One of the essential contributions of ecological law is its recognition that the community may be a conflictual place, requiring the elaboration of legal tools to deal with these clashes. Instead, both the ecological and religious movements have an idealist vision that all people will become brothers and develop a planetary sense of community based on affective fraternity. In fact, in their documents, the world as a family, guided by Mother Earth, is a familiar narration. Moreover, idealists irritate the non-believers of climate change because they have great faith in the righteousness of their ecological beliefs. International law takes a more pragmatic view of daily living interactions, and tries to build legal frameworks to handle accepted differences, promoting a planetary sense of community-based on human-created laws. They have allies in scholars in the field of citizenship studies.

#### **2.4. *Citizenship studies***

Several political scientists have postulated we are transitioning from national to transnational citizenship because integrating forces – international governance institutions, multinational corporations, and global civil society – are generating a single global system. This process is tortuous and conflictful because, as underlined by Falk (1994), the forces drawing the world together also cause counteracting forces pushing it apart. The actions of integrating trigger the reactions of fragmentation. Geopolitical activism can provoke national isolationism, and economic globalization stimulates localist backlash (Falk, 1994).

In this transitional planetary phase, we no longer identify a community with a specific place because the world-as-a-whole has become a place in its own right. Meanwhile, the growth of social networks of cyberspace builds a sense of community beyond territory. However, there is in many people the growing awareness of the dependence of our own wellbeing on the wellbeing of the earth and that the “me-centered culture” is hurting both people and the environment. The culture of the atomized individual, already denounced by Philip Slater (1972) in his seminal book,

---

*The Pursuit of Loneliness*, has brought us to the brink of planetary destruction. According to Paul Raskin, our obsession with wealth and power has turned out to be the path to destruction of our habitat and selves. If we want to find a way forward, we must adopt a fundamentally different vision of human enterprise and shared endeavor. We urgently need a synthesis of the values and practices that foster planetary solidarity and develop true global citizens, with significant transition initiatives toward a future of sustainability and human justice (Raskin et al., 2002).

In his 2006 essay “In Search of Solidarity” Chris Hayes wrote that solidarity takes two forms, “mundane” and “sublime”. The mundane brand, which relates to what is often called identity politics, unites like to like, affirming sameness. It can be empowering and divisive, depending on the specific case and context. But in solidarity’s more sublime register, a group or individual gazes outward, beyond similarity toward something more capacious. Solidarity aiming at transformational change requires we do not just recognize and sympathize with the plight of others, but also join them as equals, reaching across differences without erasing them. Solidarity in its sublime form breaks the boundaries of identity, connecting us to others even when we are not the same (Hayes, 2006).

An Italian political scientist, Giovanni Moro, thinks we are going beyond the identification of citizenship and nationality and developing multiple, flexible, transnational, post-national and a-national citizens, and multilevel citizenships models (Moro, 2020).

Moro characterizes modern democratic citizenship into three components: belonging, rights/duties, and participation. Belonging refers to the legal and social status, which permits a national identity. Rights include civil, social, and political rights plus human rights, whereas duties are essential to guarantee the rights. He distinguishes two types of duties: those of reciprocity, such as the payment of taxes, and those of solidarity, such as military service. The third component is the citizen’s participation through the exercise of vote, the organization of political parties, and in general, the organization of political representation, vertically through pressure and protest movements and horizontally through associations and social ties.

According to Moro, each of these components of democratic citizenship is in crisis. Belonging has been weakened by uncertainties regarding borders, changing social structure of reference, withdrawal of common citizenship, super-nationalism, multiplication of identity forms, the weakening of social relations, and civil recession. Rights have been complicated by the inclusion of human rights, the gap in the implementation of rights and the related politics, and the revindication of new rights based on differences. Duties have witnessed persons and corporations trying to escape the payment of taxes, the end of military service, and uncertainty regarding new responsibilities. Participation has been weakened by the ineffectiveness of popular nationalism, the abandonment of the political system by many citizens, and new forms of participation and representation.

The world of citizenship has changed in recent decades also, according to Turner (2017) Globalization and the emergence of neoliberalism as a hegemonic vision of the world have undermined the foundations of democratic citizenship. In particular, globalization has questioned the administrative, spatial, symbolic, cultural, religious boundaries on which citizenship is based and the distribution of resources through taxation. Neoliberalism, with the financialization of the economy, through the alliance between states, supranational institutions, and private financial companies undermined citizenship’s very basis, for example, the productive work in industry. The demographic crisis characterized by low birth rates for its part has promoted salary levels that are not sufficient to sustain decent lives and has created a contradiction between markets, which need migrants as workers, and states that are built on a cultural unity (Turner, 2017). Moreover, there

---

has been an erosion of civic institutions. Civil society has been substituted by the market, even in the selling of citizenship. In some states as Malta you can actually buy your citizenship by paying a fee or making a relevant financial investment. According to Turner, these changes have created an isolated apolitical citizen who buys privately what previously were social services and does not actively engage politically in the world. Moro underlines that Turner ties citizenship too much to the British form of social State and does not mention other positive changes, which have taken place also in the last decades. For example, there has been the increasing success of women's movements to define and implement women's rights and the LGBT to define their rights. We have also witnessed the acceptance of the debts we own to indigenous populations and the enlargement of human rights to all earthlings.

Moro describes a type of citizenship that may help promote a more planetary sense of community. Cosmopolitan or global citizenship is a status that should be attributed to all members of the human species. It is to be based on human rights as first stated by the UN in 1946 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It would contrast human rights against racial, sexual, and other forms of discrimination, including child labor and migration. However, these are difficult to implement with weak international regimes of law and justice.

The fast-growing use of Internet and social networks of cyberspace may reinforce the sense of community beyond territory. It may increase visceral awareness of the dependence of our own wellbeing on the wellbeing of the earth. Between the age of 14-64, each citizen of the world is spending six hours and forty-two minutes a day on Internet. Another study on the use of social networks like Facebook found that the average world user spent two hours and a half daily. Every second, 11 people use social media for the first time. In 2017, less than 2,5 billion people were on social media worldwide; today, in 2020, that has increased to 3,8 billion persons, which is more than half the world population (BroadbandSearch, 2020).

Spending so much time on the Internet means we can find groups to foster new and often transient individual identities. Protest movements like FFF have reached global audiences through Internet and social media. However, others may forget that we inhabit a living planet. Online life becomes much more real and salient than face to face events, and therefore it could promote indifference to climate change. Some preliminary results, of ongoing research has confirmed the relationship between the high use of Internet and defining oneself as a citizen of the world (Mebane & Francescato, in press). More studies are needed in this domain.

The World Wildlife Fund suggests that for transformative change to occur, the underlying assumptions of materialism and individualism must be challenged. They propose that, in place of these assumptions, the ability to value others when making behavioral choices should be prioritized. This inclusive aspect of self-identity is undermined by the marketing approach, which encourages people to consider their consumer behaviors to define their identity, rather than intrinsic or morally driven factors. A transformative process that changes this way of thinking would require a re-examination of the relationships between people, and between people and the natural environment, to create a systemic approach to environmental involvement that reflects inclusive values (World Wildlife Fund, 2008).

This brief review shows that we are only at the beginning of a long journey of strengthening the three components that may produce a planetary sense of community. We are making some steps using the human rights framework to imagine and explore the legal means to become world citizens. We have made progress through the environmental movement of movements, religious groups, and the study of international law and citizenship to State that we have an ethical responsibility to heal the damage we inflicted on the natural world.

---

This healing process cannot be done without repairing the damage done to all the black, brown, indigenous people, and also to the downtrodden poor whites, who are suffering in their bodies and souls from this unjust, sexist, and racist world - who furthermore are going to be the primary victims of climate change disasters. We have a long way to go, and community psychology coalitions for building skills could be useful. We have to move faster to increase trust and solidarity with the out-groups, to have a greater possibility of building the affective tie that will give us the emotional energy to begin developing deep positive feelings of belonging to our planet and act accordingly.

Sometimes a tragedy or an exceptional event can give us the push we need to enact change. Climate change and COVID-19 constitute two threats that could bond us together to build a planetary sense of community.

### **3. Why urgent actions are necessary for achieving a healthy global community**

#### ***3.1 COVID-19, health and climate change are not distant cousins, and healing ourselves and our planet is an urgent business***

The 2020 pandemic has shown how high air pollution is related to increases in the mortality rate of COVID-19. In fact, in Italy, the places most hit by the virus, Lombardy, Veneto, and Emilia Romagna, have a high level of particulate (EEA, 2019). Among 10,000 Italians who died of Coronavirus, 50 percent of the most important eight preexisting diseases were the same as those tied to local air pollution: ischemic heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lower respiratory infection, and lung cancer (Mebane 2020a). In the United States, a Harvard nation-wide study found that “an increase of only one microgram of particulate matter 2.5, per cubic meter, is associated with a 15% increase in the mortality rate of Corona” (Wu et al., 2020). Indoor and outdoor air pollution from fossil fuels caused an estimated 7.1 million deaths in 2015 (Coady et al., 2019). By comparison, automobile accidents caused 1.3 million deaths annually (Harari, 2019). Air pollution mortality is caused by people inhaling or ingesting ambient PM 2.5 (particulate matter with diameter up to 2.5 micrometers), which is fine enough to penetrate the lungs and bloodstream. PM 2.5 can be emitted directly from fuel combustion or formed indirectly from atmospheric reactions involving sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) or nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) (Coady et al., 2019). Burning fossil fuels produces energy, and carbon dioxide, and particulate matter. Other important pollutants include carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, and lead.

Today 90% of the energy consumed comes from fossil fuels coal, oil, and natural gas. The more people we are, over 7.2 billion in 2020, projected to be 11 billion in 2100, the more we need energy for heating and cooling of our homes, for producing and delivering all the goods and services we consume, for personal travel by cars, public transport, trains, and airplanes.

#### ***3.2 The worsening of climate change requires a quicker switch to renewables and energy efficiency***

Our planet is becoming warmer. It is already one degree hotter than in 1860. We have more frequent storms, tropical cyclones, and hurricanes; hotter summers, heat waves, (sustained wet-bulb-temperatures over 35 degrees can be fatal), and desertification. More severe forest fires occur (Australia, California, Russia, and Canada). Variations in temperature, humidity, soil conditions,

---

and deforestation (destroying natural habitat) are favoring spillover. Sixty percent of emerging infectious diseases are transmitted to humans by wild animals (SARS, Ebola, HIV). Due to global warming, the increase in temperatures may put in circulation bacteria and viruses, frozen in permafrost, in polar icefields and glaciers, thousands of years ago.

This could have grave consequences for humans and other living creatures on our planet. Also, thawing permafrost leads to increased greenhouse gas emissions. The gas that bubbles from the oxygen-deprived mud under ponds and lakes is carbon dioxide and methane, which is 25 times as potent a greenhouse gas as CO<sub>2</sub>. The summer of 2020 has seen a significant acceleration of prolonged hot temperatures (30-35 degrees), which could thaw large permafrost sections. Moreover, on May 29<sup>th</sup> in Norilsk, following the melting of permafrost, a building crumbled, and 20,000 tons of diesel fuel spread in the Siberian rivers. Many scientists are alarmed because similar accidents could happen in gas, oil, and nuclear structures, causing a chain of environmental disasters.

Also, the impact of global warming is not uniform, some of the most vulnerable countries will have the most severe impacts. “There are three major ways in which global warming will make changes to regional climate: melting or forming ice, changing the hydrological cycle (of evaporation and precipitation), and changing currents in the oceans and air flows in the atmosphere. The coastal regions will suffer severe impacts from sea-level rise. The Arctic, Africa, small islands, and Asian mega-deltas are also likely to be especially affected by future climate change. Africa is one of the most vulnerable continents to climate variability and change because of multiple existing stresses and low adaptive capacity. Climate change is projected to decrease freshwater availability in central, south, east, and southeast Asia, particularly in large river basins. With population growth and increasing demand from higher living standards, this decrease could adversely affect more than a billion people by the 2050s” (Wikipedia 2020, p.1).

To reduce carbon dioxide emissions, there are two main paths: investment in energy efficiency and production of energy from renewable sources, and to a lesser extent, investment in technologies of carbon dioxide removal (IPCC, 2018). This is the technological basis for reducing emissions and achieving climate improvement goals.

### ***3.3 The current global situation of carbon dioxide emissions and their reduction***

The UN Environmental Program’s Emissions Gap Report is the accepted international source for tracking the situation of existing greenhouse gas emissions and the reductions needed to reach the IPCC goals. Each year, the report has found that the world is not doing enough. “Emissions have only risen, hitting a new high of 55.3 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent in 2018... we are still on course for a 3.2°C temperature rise. Our collective failure to act strongly and early means that we must now implement deep and urgent cuts... to get in line with the Paris Agreement, emissions must drop 7.6 percent per year from 2020 to 2030 for the 1.5°C goal and 2.7 percent per year for the 2°C goal. The size of these annual cuts may seem shocking, particularly for 1.5°C” (UNEP, 2019). “Fossil CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from energy use and industry, which dominate total GHG emissions, grew 2.0 percent in 2018, reaching a record 37.5 GtCO<sub>2</sub> per year. There is no sign of GHG emissions peaking in the next few years; every year of postponed peaking means that deeper and faster cuts will be required” (UNEP, 2019a, p.14).

The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned us “that going beyond 1.5°C will increase the frequency and intensity of climate impacts, such as the heatwaves and storms witnessed across the globe in the last few years. We cannot afford to fail” (UNEP, 2019b, p.13).

---

The temporary reduction in global daily global emission during the COVID-19 forced confinement is estimated to be between -4 to -7 percent of the year 2020 emissions (Le Quéré et al., 2020). After the pandemic, economic activities will resume growth, together with the corresponding emissions. It will be tough to cut emissions back to 55% lower than the 2018 level by 2030, as required by the 1.5°C goal.

The extent of warming of the planet and the relative damage depends on the size and rapidity of our abatement and mitigation investments, which to date has been one of procrastination. Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is not quickly reabsorbed in the ocean, so we will have to get to near-zero emissions before the total amount atmospheric carbon dioxide begins to peak. However, we are already experiencing alarming new climate phenomena, and one thing is certain - it is going to get worse as GHG accumulates.

In the US “the crisis in the nation's most populous state is more than just an accumulation of individual catastrophes. It is also an example of something climate experts have long worried about. Still, which few have expected to see soon: a cascade effect, in which a series of disasters overlap, triggering or amplifying each other...A scorching summer led to dry conditions never before experienced. That aridity helped make the season's wildfires the biggest ever recorded. Six of the 20 largest wildfires in modern California history have occurred this year...The intensely hot wildfires are not only chasing thousands of people from their homes but causing dangerous chemicals to leach into the drinking water” (Fuller & Flavelle, 2020, p.1). Also, the smoke can be deadly, particularly among older people. Together this creates multiple crises for the emergencies themselves and the economic recovery afterward. We must add all the other extreme weather such as heatwaves, droughts, hurricanes, flooding, and ice melting that occur with greater frequency and intensity, not to mention the loss in biodiversity. We are not prepared for the cascading disasters that are happening now.

As a result, migration is likely going to be a part of the global climate crisis. “Our modeling and the consensus of academics point to the same bottom line: If societies respond aggressively to climate change and migration and increase their resilience to it, food production will be shored up, poverty reduced and international migration slowed — factors that could help the world remain more stable and more peaceful. If leaders take fewer actions against climate change, or more punitive ones against migrants, food insecurity will deepen, as will poverty. Populations will surge, and cross-border movement will be restricted, leading to greater suffering. Whatever actions governments take next — and when they do it — makes a difference. The window for action is closing. The world can now expect that with every degree of temperature increase, roughly a billion people will be pushed outside the zone in which humans have lived for thousands of years. For a long time, the climate alarm has been sounded in terms of its economic toll, but now it can increasingly be counted in people harmed” (Lustgarten, 2020a, p. 1).

### ***3.4. Some actions in Europe***

In Italy, scientists and opinion leaders have petitioned the public television (RAI) to give daily information on these temperatures changes worldwide, declaring a climate emergency (Letter of July 2020). It is extremely urgent to multiply the projects for clean energy, which could be carried out by assigning additional resources to existing energy programs, with a quick start and simpler management. Furthermore, reducing local air pollution would mean decreasing the emissions of fossil fuels and carbon dioxide, and lowering the growth of pollution-related diseases. The actions are part of the energy-climate plan (PNIEC) being updated by the European Commission. The

---

initiative could include new European funding allocated after the COVID-19 crisis, which could offer new employment. Many energy efficiency activities have a high labor intensity. Typical energy efficiency interventions include building redevelopment: condominiums, houses, schools, public buildings, offices, and the integration of renewable energy sources in construction, with a commitment to the gradual elimination of heating oil. In the transport sector, the priorities indicated were the shift of private passenger mobility towards collective mobility and “Smart Mobility”; moving freight from road to rail, and the efficiency of vehicles. Using the available European and national funds well, we could simultaneously improve the environment, public health, and create jobs for young people starting in the areas most affected by COVID-19 (Francescato, 2020).

To make the drastic economic changes needed to face this climate emergency, we need political leaders with courage and vision, and a public opinion that supports their efforts. How likely is that this will happen, how, as community psychologists, can we contribute to this epochal shift?

#### **4. Why we need to elect more female politicians who care about citizens' health and the environment**

For decades, environmentalists and scientists have pressed for policies to enhance energy savings and renewable energy, with little or partial success, because they clashed with politicians who favor the interests of fossil fuel companies. Alternatively, they have met politicians who prefer to sponsor large works that often damage the environment but offer the possibility of receiving contributions for parties and foundations or bribes that enrich them personally, as money has become a dominant value for many.

Ecofeminists (Marcomin & Cima, 2017) argue that we must vote for more women and support them in their careers to get them to the top. In general, women are more in favor of funding projects for health, education, and the environment. Men are more willing to favor business and armament expenses (Adam & Derber, 2016). Our research with local and regional parliamentarians and politicians has also found the same gender differences (Francescato et al., 2017). According to ecofeminists having women at the top during a health crisis might result in more attention given to saving lives than business. COVID-19 has provided some preliminary evidence in support of this hypothesis. Countries with the least deaths have been New Zealand, Iceland, Germany, South Korea, Norway, and Finland; all nations run by women. The crisis has claimed more victims in the United States, Great Britain, and Brazil led by males who have minimized health risks to promote rapid economic recovery. Trump, Johnson, and Bolsonaro are authoritarian, narcissistic men with immense egos who conceive the fight against COVID-19 as an opportunity to dominate nature and show off their virility by refusing to wear masks! These alpha males are our adversaries, ecofeminists say, not all males. It is no coincidence that alpha males detest environmentalists and deny that we have climate change produced by human beings. Bolsonaro has given the green light to the brutal exploitation of the Amazon rainforest, regardless of the Indians' rights. For his part, Trump has removed many of the environmental regulations and wants to reopen the coal mines and build new coal-fired plants.

A woman, elected for the first time at the top in the European Union, Ursula von der Leyen, has presented the most forward-looking green project, the European Green Deal (EU, 2020b). This plan outlines a set of European Commission initiatives that aim to achieve climate neutrality in Europe in 2050. The program includes sanctions for countries that do not cut their harmful

---

emissions, however, emission reductions may prove too slow to face the most severe environmental problems ever.

#### ***4.1 The European green deal is not enough: The members of the FFF movement respond***

The followers of Greta Thunberg, of Fridays For Future, support the European Green Plan but shout that it does not set ambitious enough goals that can cope with the problem. “We only have eight years to make drastic changes and prevent global warming from causing irreversible damage” (FFF, 2020, p. 2). They demand that governments declare a state of emergency and that politicians implement extraordinary measures to achieve zero emissions by boosting renewable energies, energy efficiency, waste recycling, and the circular economy. In particular, the FFF is fighting for planetary environmental justice. Developed countries have created the majority of environmental problems. However, the most severe consequences continue to weigh on the vulnerable and emerging countries in the Arctic, Africa, small islands, and Asian mega-deltas. This environmental injustice must be remedied. The FFF support the movement seeking to promote a fair sharing of ecological benefits and harms, and equitable access to decision-making processes on environmental measures. They denounce racism and discrimination, which led to the placement of waste management plants and dangerous industrial plants in the poorest neighborhoods. The FFF protest, and demonstrate with members of civil rights movements, against racism and homophobia. They march in the streets with the feminists against violence against women and with migrants exploited in the countryside worldwide. Already at the age of 15, their inspirer, Greta Thunberg, now 17, had understood that the environmental problem, to be solved, requires a fight against all the inequalities that afflict our planet (Thunberg et al., 2019; Francescato, 2019).

#### ***4.2 Who can be our unlikely allies in reshaping the world economy?***

Political and business elites, both in liberal and state-capitalist countries, resist reshaping an economy that may not allow them to remain in power. They often crush most forms of opposition because they control the armed forces, financial institutions, and state-capitalist countries, also the media. However, climate change issues may create a wedge among these elites, and alliances till now unlikely may become possible. Change may be possible, if we could increase a planetary sense of community in the majority of oppressed people, and in at least a substantial minority of business and military elites, who have the power and the money to make systemic structural changes.

Here are some examples of how this is could happen. We could create a planetary sense of community empowering masses of oppressed citizens to be “ecological consumers” through available technology on smartphones. Each consumer, using cell phone apps for screening the environmental impact of products, could, through his choice of purchases, determine which products and services are favored. Recently the Economist published a speculative scenario, “What if technology tracked all carbon emissions?” in which the carbon emissions of consumers’ products and services were calculated and totaled for each individual by the state (Economist, 2020).

We could also find the most unlikely ally in the financial industry, which shows a strong interest in developing and using guidelines rating the companies' environmental, social, and governance characteristics. These environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria are becoming a set of standards for a company’s operations that socially conscious investors use to screen potential investments. This is important in orienting large union, public and institutional funds towards

---

environmentally favourable investments. In recent years, younger investors have shown an interest in putting their money where their values are. Brokerage firms and mutual fund companies have begun to offer exchange-traded funds (ETFs) and other financial products that follow ESG criteria. According to the most recent report from US SIF Foundation, investors held \$11.6 trillion in assets chosen according to ESG criteria at the beginning of 2018, up from \$8.1 trillion just two years earlier. Additional research is required for making ESG criteria more rigorous and subject to external control (Mebane, 2020b).

Perhaps advances to fight climate change will be led by highly ranked ESG companies and their investors. Climate activists will have to monitor carefully. For example, will these organizations always respect local indigenous communities that are fighting for their resources? Will these organizations always invest well? We must avoid greenwashing, and we need to monitor companies to see their actual impact on the environment. The European Union plans to finance part of its Green Deal through a well-defined ecological taxonomy of financial instruments such as European Green Bonds. What constitutes a “green” investment in such bonds is well-described (EU, 2020c). The World Bank and other international organizations have used Green or Sustainable bonds to fund investments in energy savings and alternative energy sources, also in developing countries.

We will surely find some allies to build a planetary sense of community and pursue the green revolution in some representatives of the major religious faiths, which have long experimented with planetary diffusion of their beliefs. In the past, some of these religious movements have helped colonization, but now they are often among the more progressive defenders of indigenous people and the environment. For instance, the Global Catholic Climate launched a campaign to disinvest in fossil fuels and invest in renewables and efficiency. On the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Laudato Si, 42 faith institutions in 14 countries, from Great Britain to Bangladesh, pledged to adopt the disinvest/invest program (Roewe, 2020).

## **5. What can community psychologists do to foster a planetary sense of community and fight climate change?**

### ***5.1 First heal wounds from COVID-19 and then promote climate change awareness***

As European community psychologists, we organized weekly zoom meetings, from March to September 2020, to support each other during the lockdown and share news and points of view on the pandemic. We were also joined by some community psychologists in the United States and Canada. In the same months, I also gave informal phone supervision to former students and young colleagues working in hospitals or their homes, supporting remote people with different online modalities.

I learned that many people had to face losing dear ones, without being near the dying, without celebrating funerals, without hugs and embraces, and had unmet emotional complications. Many craved to diminish their guilt feelings and profound regrets for having been unable to give a last greeting to a dear one, who longed desperately for it. Health professionals complained that they did their best to have dying patients reach significant others, but often they did not succeed and testified how devastating this experience was for them. Many needed to receive individual psychological support or to join mutual aid groups, which offer an opportunity for wounded people to be heard and to meet other people who share their grief.

---

Some of my younger colleagues underlined that we had to prevent domestic violence on women and children by increasing territorial psychological services and women's centers. Particularly mentioned was the necessity to provide psychological services to COVID-19 health personnel, who risk having nightmares, sleep difficulties, and other psychosomatic symptoms. Nurses and doctors denounced having problems with their children and partners whom they had to "neglect" for long periods of exhausting work.

After first healing the psychological distress, clinical community psychologists, who will work with single clients or small groups in the next months and probably years, can use COVID-19 as a trigger to raise their clients' awareness of the relations between health, climate change, and environmental pollution. They can encourage their clients to get involved in groups doing something positive for our planet since research shows that joining a group positively affects health and wellbeing, similar to stopping to smoke (Francescato, 2010). They can share with their clients what can be done at the individual level to increase our planetary sense of community, discussing how even small actions, like consuming less energy, buying efficient household appliances, practicing circular economy in the home, using more ecological transport (walking, cycling, car-sharing) and recycling, can make us feel part of a vast community of individuals, who all over the world care for our planet as we do. When speaking to clients, students in schools, or community groups, we can mention how important it is to make energy diagnoses of our homes and all the buildings we use in our neighborhoods (schools, offices, sports centers, churches, hospitals, nursing homes). Then we can promote their energy requalification and upkeep.

Experiencing lasting negative feelings has made many people more liable to depression and psychosomatic illnesses. Two recent studies support my qualitative impressions. A recent survey study, comparing 1,441 respondents during the COVID-19 pandemic and 5,065 respondents before the epidemic, showed that depression symptoms were three-times more frequent during the COVID-19 pandemic than before. Adult Americans, having less than 5,000 dollars in savings, were associated with a greater risk of depression symptoms during the epidemic (Ettman et al., 2020). Another study found that COVID-19 has pushed millions of Americans, especially young adults, to move in with family members, increasing possible family conflicts. The share of 18- to 29-year-olds living with their parents has become a majority since US coronavirus cases began spreading early this year, surpassing the previous peak during the Great Depression. In July, 52% of young adults resided with one or both of their parents, up from 47% in February, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis of monthly Census Bureau data. The number living with parents grew to 26.6 million, an increase of 2.6 million from February. The number and share of young adults living with their parents grew across the board for all major racial and ethnic groups, men and women, and metropolitan and rural residents, as well as in all four main census regions (Pew Research, 2020)

## **5.2 *Raising climate change awareness as CP professionals***

As professional community psychologists, we may increase our awareness that we are facing significant challenges and try to promote a planetary sense of community, which might enhance feelings of "sublime solidarity" for all the inhabitants of the planet, especially for those who are more likely to suffer from the effects of climate warming. If environmental injustice continues, even the "winners" will live mutilated lives, prisoners in their luxury ghettos, at the mercy of their bodyguards.

---

We can spread knowledge of environmental problems in our national and international psychological associations. We can create a Worldwide Association of Community Psychologists for promoting a planetary sense of community.

As practicing community psychologists, we have much experience creating health education and active citizenship projects; we may train young volunteers to run special workshops that promote relational skills, mutual respect, intergenerational solidarity, and caring for the environment. Respect and a sense of community are learned in the family but must be promoted in all contexts in which we live, from apartment buildings to schools, to workplaces, and in particular, on Internet. In all the places we live, we can promote a planetary sense of community, linking together the local and the global, reminding ourselves that we inhabit a small living planet.

Some community psychologists have experimented with new ways to raise environmental awareness. In Italy, some community psychologists have begun to collaborate with environmental experts to hold joint workshops realized in schools, sports centers, third sector associations, centers for the elderly, and other places of civic aggregation. The purpose is to promote awareness of environmental problems and to increase the willingness of individuals and associations to take actions to deal with them. In Canada, (Dittmer & Riemer, 2012) developed an educational project for youth involved in community environmental organizations based on a CP theoretical model, which could be implemented in many other such organizations. I briefly describe both projects because they can inspire community psychologists who want to act against climate change.

### *5.2.1 Fostering critical thinking about climate change for volunteers of an environmental association*

Dittmer and Riemer (2012) conducted an education project with youth engaged in a community-based environmental organization. They hypothesized that engaged and critically aware youth could become change agents for social movements. The project was projected to go beyond the individual-focused mode of operation by expanding the participants' vision to include the multiple levels (government, businesses, peer groups, etc.), influencing environmental behaviors and the connections between them. The second component of the workshops' message was that the forces that influence individuals could, in turn, be affected by the individuals themselves. Through a process of critical reflection and discussion, this aspect tried to raise the youths' consciousness of the influence they can have on the diverse forces that impact the environmental situation.

Five community psychology concepts guided this project: stakeholder participation, ecological and systems thinking, social justice, praxis, and empirical grounding. Four two to three hours of workshops were organized. Using consumer culture and its impact on the environment as an example, the first workshop provided an introduction to the workshops' purpose and an orientation to the primary tool to be used for critical consciousness-raising: the ecological model. The second dealt with urban planning and design and focused on such factors as bike lanes and suburban sprawl and promoting non- or low-polluting modes of transportation. The third workshop addressed the relationship between government policy and climate change. The content focused on how legislation is developed and how individuals and groups can influence this process. The Green Energy Act of Ontario was explored to provide an example of these ideas in the environment's context. The last workshop dealt with the issue of environmental injustice: how those with the least power to create change in the environment are often the ones most impacted by its effects.

---

The three components of critical thinking (systems, reflective, and empathic) were emphasized in all four workshops. The youth were provided with a cyclical, reinforcing the process of reflect-act-reflect, since time was provided in each workshop to discuss how the previous workshop's theme had become relevant in their work experiences. In the long-term, the youths' motivation to do further research on environmental issues and initiate conversations with others may be reinforced with this reflection-action-reflection process as they continue developing their knowledge and skills. The ecological organizations continued to use the workshop content for training purposes.

According to the authors the process of explicitly linking theoretical concepts of community psychology to the practical work, strengthened their conviction that we, as community psychology researchers and practitioners, have access to tools, resources, and knowledge that can make a significant contribution to the environmental movement (Dittmer & Riemer, 2012).

### *5.2.2 A pilot workshop in a school facilitated by an environmental activist and community psychologist*

In many projects to promote health, active citizenship, and environmental education, community psychologists in Italy have used the “Circle Time” method for decades, where in a circle, the participants explore positive and negative emotions aroused by the topic addressed. To promote changes, it is necessary to consider the feelings that changes provoke, as the theorists of socio-affective education based on Circle Time maintain. This method was introduced in Italy in the book, *Stare bene insieme a scuola*, published in 1986 and reprinted twenty times (Francescato, 1986-2018). This method has proved useful in improving relationships between students and teachers, and among students, preventing school dropout, and promoting individual and group socio-political empowerment. By addressing complex issues such as environmental degradation and climate change with an empowering methodology, individuals identify small changes that they can undertake in daily life and in groups, to join the fight for changes at local and international level. The empowering courses usually require five or six days of face-to-face or online training (Francescato et al., 2004). However, in a period of climatic emergency, some high school teachers asked us in FFF to arrange shorter interventions to increase climate change awareness among their students. Therefore, we tested a workshop (requiring a minimum of two hours extendable up to eight hours) facilitated by an expert in environmental issues, and a psychologist expert in socio-affective education and empowering methodologies.

This climate change awareness workshop includes four phases: In the first phase, the two trainers introduce themselves and tell how they became environmental activists. This first phase creates an atmosphere of trust and curiosity, crucial to stimulating interest in climate change. In the second phase, the environmental expert explains the fundamental concepts of climate change and illustrates various aspects of the on-going environmental crisis. In the third phase, the psychologist facilitates the identification and recognition of the negative and positive emotions aroused by climate change, with individual, couple, and small group exercises. The fourth final phase explores what participants can do as individuals, a class, and a school. They also examine which environmental movements they can contact. This methodology seems to arouse a great variety of negative and positive emotions and increases the “desire to do something”. However, we must still evaluate the comparative effectiveness of the concise two-hour interventions, in which each phase lasts about 30 minutes and those where more time is spent on stages three and four.

---

### 5.3 *What can we do as community psychology researchers to fight climate change*

In the last fifteen years, different authors have underlined that community psychology needs to refocus on natural ecology and transactions between human systems and the natural worlds. While community psychologists have adopted ecological concepts from the field of biology and postulated ecological principles as a frame of reference for their work, the focus has been on social ecology rather than on natural ecology or the transactions between human systems and the natural world. Some community psychologists (Voorhees & Perkins, 2007) have asked why the natural environment is currently not explicit in the ecological models commonly used in community psychology (e.g., Kelly & Adger, 2000). Moreover, few textbooks include environmental chapters: Prilleltensky & Nelson (2009), and Bond, Serrano-Garcia, and Keys APA Handbook of Community Psychology (2017).

Riemer and Reich (2011) wrote about the difficulties they had to edit a special issue: “Publications that dealt with global climate change specifically were infrequent. Given the importance of this issue, we decided to edit a special issue for the American Journal of Community Psychology to promote more thinking and dialogue on the topic. When we began the special issue, we were optimistic that many community psychologists were doing exciting work in this area and that a call for papers would bring these contributions to the forefront... but the bulk of submissions we received did not concretely tie global climate change to community psychology. Thus, what we expected to be a watershed response has been a slow trickle... Our ambitious plans for a special issue became a special section with a small but beneficial mix of empirical work and theoretical contributions. Unfortunately, no papers address practical work” (Riemer & Reich 2011, p. 351). In the same year, the *American Psychologist* (2011) published an issue on climate change with many environmental psychologists and environmentalists from different fields.

Even some years later, in 2017, the CP authors of the APA CP handbook chapter on environmental issues, write: “the natural environment and sustainability have not been prevalent issues within community psychology, and there is no coherent framework or theory that links the existing contributions by community psychologists together” (Riemer & Harré, 2017, p. 442). In 2018, Clayton and Manning published an entire book of articles on perceptions, communication, responses, and resilience to climate change, including topics such as the increase of climate refugees, community wellbeing, and mental health, mostly written by social psychologists. So, it seems that community psychologists have been publishing fewer works on climate change than social and environmental psychologists. Things may change soon, however.

A very recent special issue on climate change in the *American Psychologist* (Nielsen et al., 2020) maintains that psychologists’ research efforts have predominantly focused on individual consumeristic behaviors that can have immediate effects on emissions: adjusting home thermostats or using public rather than private transportation. These actions often, however, have relatively small per-capita impacts on the emission of greenhouse gases. Psychologists might instead change frequently performed behaviours, like the choice of travel mode, or infrequent high impact behaviors that include maintaining, upgrading, or replacing high energy products such as motor vehicles and furnaces. Psychologists could also promote more fundamental lifestyle changes, such as adopting a vegetarian diet.

The authors underline the importance of exploring more individual choices that influence political, economic, and cultural contexts going beyond the consumeristic paradigm: to initiate or join a community group to take mitigation action or influence public policies and organizational

---

choices. They suggest that we should contact members of organizations that produce or can affect emissions (corporations, universities, government agencies); members of social, cultural, and religious communities, and political activists who can influence policies at various levels to reduce emissions, to facilitate lower emissions choices by organizations and households, and to promote organizational investments in negative-emission technologies.

The authors think it will be necessary for psychologists to appreciate approaches and paradigms that recognize units of analysis at a different level than the individual; through actors such as civil society organizations and corporations and networks of individuals and organizations. They recommend increasing interdisciplinary research teams and collaboration with organizational, consumer, and political psychology, but they do not mention community psychologists, who have done much research on social networks, community coalitions, and minority groups. Neither do they discuss the work of European community psychologists who have developed specific methodologies that can be employed to foster better environmental choices in organizations and local communities through multidimensional organizational analysis and community profiling (Francescato, 2013; Martini & Sequi, 1995; Zani, 2012). However, recognizing that researchers have to focus on units of analysis at a different level than the individual, Nielsen et al. (2020) have increased the probability to include more community approaches to climate change-related topics. I hope the publication of this special issue will attract more community psychologists to climate change and that environmental, social, and political psychologists and environmental scientists of many disciplines will engage in future joint studies with us. But time is running out, and climate change disasters are increasing, and it would be helpful if more community psychologists also become climate change activists.

#### **5.4 *Conclusions: Should more community psychologists become activists?***

I became an activist again at the age of 74, two years ago, because Greta Thunberg and her FFF adolescents convinced me that climate change would most affect poor women and children. My feminist and class rebel parts could not be satisfied with just elaborating new professional interventions to increase European school students' climate awareness. I am sincerely convinced that Greta is correct. She created a worldwide movement with millions of young people because climate change is not a problem of only western countries; it will also affect many poor people in the Global South. COVID-19 pandemic will be followed by others worldwide; if north and south poles glaciers melt and viruses will travel across borders. They will provoke more deaths in poor countries with fewer health facilities, more poverty, disease, child marriages, and domestic violence (Kristof, 2020).

I hope that reading this paper, more community psychologists all over the world will take into consideration the inclusion of climate change in their teaching, research, and professional activities, and some will become climate change activists. I especially would like that more Latin American Liberation community psychologists, will include climate injustice in their analysis of oppression. Colonization and enslavement processes rightly describe past and current phenomena that harm citizens of the global South. Climate change also focuses on the future of young people everywhere. Some community psychologists (Watkins & Shulman, 2008) have developed a program that focuses on community psychology, liberation psychology, and ecopsychology (see <http://www.pacifica.edu/cle.aspx>). I hope many more programs like this one will spread in all continents.

---

We are all inhabitants of one small planet, our precious, fragile earth, and we need to feel a planetary sense of community to react to a climate change crisis that will damage the most poor and oppressed people. The development of a planetary sense of community has already begun in the ecological movement of movements, fighting classist, racist, sexist oppression and power and economic inequalities present both in liberal capitalistic and state capitalistic countries. In international law, lawyers are working on redefining citizenship. At the same time, political scientists and sociologists have shown that we are transitioning toward cosmopolitan or global citizenship, which will be attributed to all members as a fundamental human right. New forms of intergenerational solidarity and sublime forms of solidarity toward distant and diverse people are practiced by the millions of people involved in these diverse movements. However, we are still very far from reaching a planetary sense of community. Powerful opposing forces are working to produce more oppression, racism, sexism, and foster hate and exclusion processes. In our polarized society, we urgently need to find issues that unite us. Climate change could help many of us to overcome deep political divides and recognize how urgently we have to fight to protect our planet, that is our common home.

Here is a shortlist of actions we can undertake as community activists to fight climate change. I hope some readers will add to the list and post it on social media to reach other people who can add additional actions and build a worldwide chain of hope.

As activists, we can fight environmental injustice by joining protests by sustaining legal national and international campaigns against racism and discrimination. We can partner with eco-feminists who maintain that there is a tie between the subordination of women in society, domestic violence, the abuse of natural resources, environmental degradation, and the increase of local wars and ethnic conflicts.

We can collaborate with anti-racists groups. The disregard for black lives, people of colour, and indigenous people's lives are also at the root of the climate crisis. Centuries of colonization and the extraction of resources have created inequitable climate impacts. Any meaningful solution to the climate crisis must, therefore, include racial equity and justice. In other words, we must oppose racism every day if we want action on climate to succeed (350.org, 2020).

We can finance parties and politicians who support significant abatement activities, such as the European Green Deal and other similar plans (Canada, New Zealand, Scandinavian countries, etc.) We can follow local green initiatives, become activists, or sustain environmental associations such as WWF, Green Peace, and FFF.

In Europe, the disregard for people of colour kills thousands who make risky migration journeys across the Mediterranean, since European governments do not provide enough safe corridors. We should support the increase of safe corridors.

As CP associations, we can support groups like Black Lives Matter, the Dutch climate justice collectives, the European Network Against Racism, Wretched of the Earth in the UK, and others. We can partner with radical environmental groups in Latin America, Africa, and worldwide fighting for ecological and structural political change, such as Accio'n Ecologica, Ecuador Facebook Associazione della Valle dell'Alto Maipu (fighting for water rights), and Copinh Consejo Civico de Organisations Populares e Indigenas de Honduras.

Climate change mitigation is an urgent task; we community psychologists can become more involved as teachers, researchers, professionals, and activists, and contribute to foster the needed development of a planetary sense of community.

---

## References

- 350.org (2020). *In defence of black lives*. <https://350.org/global-in-defence-of-black-lives/>
- Adam, K., & Derber, C. (2016). *The new feminized majority: How democrats can change America with women's values*. Blackwell's For Learning for Life.
- Arcidiacono, C., Procentese F., & Di Napoli I. (2007). Youth, community belonging, planning and power *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 17(4), 280-295. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.935>
- Bond, M. A., Serrano-García, I., Keys, C. B., & Shinn, M. (2017). *APA handbooks in psychology. APA handbook of community psychology: Theoretical foundations, core concepts, and emerging challenges*. American Psychological Association.
- BroadbandSearch (2020). *Average daily time spent on social media*. <https://www.broadbandsearch.net/blog/average-daily-time-on-social-media>
- Cicognani, E., Zani, B., & Albanesi, C. (2012). Il senso di comunità. In B. Zani (Ed.), *Psicologia di comunità. Prospettive, idee, metodi* (pp. 163-194). Carocci.
- Clayton, S., & Manning, C. (2018). *Psychology and climate change: Human perceptions, impacts, and responses*. Elsevier.
- Cohn, R. (2011). Exploring humanity's place in the journey of the universe, *YaleEnvironment360*, 1-3. [https://e360.yale.edu/features/faith\\_and\\_environment\\_mary\\_evelyn\\_tucker\\_on\\_exploring\\_the\\_spiritual\\_side\\_of\\_the\\_journey\\_of\\_the\\_universe](https://e360.yale.edu/features/faith_and_environment_mary_evelyn_tucker_on_exploring_the_spiritual_side_of_the_journey_of_the_universe)
- Dittmer, L.D., & Riemer, M. (2012). Fostering critical thinking about climate change: Applying Community psychology to an environmental education project with youth. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 3(x), 1-9. <http://www.gjcpp.org>
- Economist. (2020). What if technology tracked all carbon emissions? *The Economist*. <https://www.economist.com/the-world-if/2020/07/04/what-if-technology-tracked-all-carbon-emissions>
- EEA (2019). *Air quality in Europe - 2019 Report*. European Environmental Agency, No 10/2010. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/air-quality-in-europe-2019>
- EJ Atlas. (2020). *What is this project about?* <https://ejatlas.org/about>
- ELGA (2020a). *Founding documents, Oslo manifesto*. <https://elgaworld.org/oslo-manifesto>
- ELGA (2020b). *Founding documents, Siena declaration*. <https://elgaworld.org/founding-documents>
- Ettman C., Abdalla, S. M., & Cohen, G. H. (2020). Prevalence of depression symptoms in US adults before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, *JAMA Netw Open*, 3(9), e2019686. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.19686>
- EU (2020a). *Financing the green transition: The European green deal investment plan and just transition mechanism*, Newsroom. [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/01/14-01-2020-financing-the-green-transition-the-european-green-deal-investment-plan-and-just-transition-mechanism](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/01/14-01-2020-financing-the-green-transition-the-european-green-deal-investment-plan-and-just-transition-mechanism)
- EU. (2020b). *A European green deal, striving to be the first climate-neutral continent*. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en)
- EU (2020c). The European green deal investment plan and just transition mechanism explained. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda\\_20\\_24](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_24)
- Falk, R. (1994). The making of global citizenship. In B. van Steenberg (Ed.), *The condition of citizenship* (pp. 127-140). Sage Publications.

- 
- FFF (2020). Circa 7 anni per agire *Fridays For Future Italia*.  
<https://www.fridaysforfutureitalia.it/crisi-climatica>
- Francescato, D. (1986-2018). *Stare bene insieme a scuola*. Carocci
- Francescato, D., Tomai M., & Mebane M. (2004). *Psicologia di comunità per la scuola, l'orientamento e la formazione Esperienze faccia a faccia e online*. Il Mulino.
- Francescato, D. (2010). *Amarsi da grandi*. Mondadori.
- Francescato, D. (2013). Community psychology practice competencies in undergraduate and graduate programs in Italy. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*.  
<https://doi.org/10.7728/0404201303>
- Francescato, D., Mebane, M., & Vecchione, M. (2017). Gender differences in personal values of national and local Italian politicians, activists and voters. *International Journal of Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12236>
- Francescato D. (2019). “Con Greta, con Greta salviamo il pianeta.”: Una ribellione dalle molte facce per ottenere azioni contro i cambiamenti climatici. *La camera blu. Rivista di studi di genere* (20), <https://doi.org/10.6092/1827-9198/6171>
- Francescato D. (2020). Ricominciare Meglio, p. 1. *Wall Street International Journal Magazine*, May 13.
- Francescato G., De Marzo, G., Martone, F., & Pratesi, F. (2002). *No global. Da Seattle a Porto Alegre*. Libri Scheiwiller.
- Francescato, G. (2018). Madre Terra, cuore dell'Enciclica. *Altronovecento*.  
[http://www.fondazionemicheletti.it/altronovecento/articolo.aspx?id\\_articolo=39&tipo\\_articolo=d\\_saggi&id=365](http://www.fondazionemicheletti.it/altronovecento/articolo.aspx?id_articolo=39&tipo_articolo=d_saggi&id=365)
- Fuller, T., & Flavelle, T. (2020). A Climate reckoning in fire-stricken California, *New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/10/us/climate-change-california-wildfires.html>
- Harari, Y.N. (2019). *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Spiegel & Grau.
- Hayes, C. (2006). In search of solidarity. *These Times*. <https://inthesetimes.com/article/in-search-of-solidarity>
- IPCC (2018). *Special report: Global warming of 1.5 degree centigrade, summary for policymakers*. <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>
- Kelly P.M., & Adger, W., N. (2000). Theory and practice in assessing vulnerability to climate change and facilitating adaptation. *Climatic Change* 47(4).  
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1005627828199>
- Kristof, N. (2020). A cataclysm of hunger, disease and illiteracy *The New York Times*. A cataclysm of hunger, disease and illiteracy *The New York Times*, Saturday and Sunday September 2020, p.8.
- Le Quéré, C., Jackson, R.B., Jones, M.W., Smith A. J.P., Abernathy, S., Andrew, R.M., De-Gol, A.J., Willis, D. R., Shan, Y., Canadell, J.G., Friedlingstein, P., Crutzig, F., & Peters, G. P. (2020). Temporary reduction in daily global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions during the COVID-19 forced confinement. *Nature Climate Change*, 10, 647–653. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-0797-x>
- Lustgarten, A., (2020a), The great climate migration. *New York Times*  
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/23/magazine/climate-migration.html?referringSource=highlightShare>
- Marcomin, F., & Cima, L. (2017). *L'ecofemminismo in Italia. Le radici di una rivoluzione necessaria*. Il Poligrafo.
- Martini ,E.R., & Sequi, R. (1995). *Il lavoro di Comunità*. Carocci.

- 
- McDougal, M.S., Riesman W.M., & Willard, A. R. (1998). *The world community: A planetary social process*. Davis Law Review. ALWD. [https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3682&context=fss\\_papers](https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3682&context=fss_papers)
- McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(198601\)14:1<6::AID-JCOP2290140103>3.0.CO;2-I](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::AID-JCOP2290140103>3.0.CO;2-I)
- Mebane W. (2020a). Global warming and Coronavirus are not distant cousins. *Wall Street International Journal*. <https://wsimag.com/economy-and-politics/61809-global-warming-and-coronavirus-are-not-distant-cousins>
- Mebane W. (2020b). Have you considered becoming a green investor?, *Wall Street International Magazine*. <https://wsimag.com/economy-and-politics/60829-have-you-considered-becoming-a-green-investor>
- Mebane, M., & Francescato, D. (In press). Do you feel more a citizen of the world or of your home town? (personal communication)
- Moro, G. (2020). *Cittadinanza, Lessico Democratico*. Mondadori Università.
- Nasa (2013). *Why we explore*. [https://www.nasa.gov/exploration/whyweexplore/why\\_we\\_explore\\_main.html#.X2YGWC8RrUo](https://www.nasa.gov/exploration/whyweexplore/why_we_explore_main.html#.X2YGWC8RrUo)
- Nelsen, A. (2015). Islamic leaders issue bold call for rapid phase out of fossil fuels, *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/aug/18/islamic-leaders-issue-bold-call-rapid-phase-out-fossil-fuels>
- Nielsen, K. S., Clayton, S., Stern, P. C., Dietz, T., Capstick, S., & Whitmarsh, L. (2020). How psychology can help limit climate change. *American Psychologist*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000624>
- Pew Research. (2020). *A majority of young adults in the U.S. live with their parents for the first time since the Great Depression*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/09/04/a-majority-of-young-adults-in-the-u-s-live-with-their-parents-for-the-first-time-since-the-great-depression/>
- Pope Francis. (2020). *Message of His Holiness for the world day of prayer for the care of creation*. [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200901\\_messaggio-giornata-cura-creato.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200901_messaggio-giornata-cura-creato.html)
- Prilleltensky, I., & Nelson, G. (2009). Community psychology: Advancing social justice. In D. Fox, I. Prilleltensky, & S. Austin (Eds.), *Critical psychology: An introduction* (p. 126–143). Sage Publications Ltd.
- Raskin, P., Banuri, T., Gallopin, G., Gutman, P., Hammon, A., Kates R., & Swart, R. (2002). *Great transition: The promise and lure of the times ahead, a report of the global scenario group*. Stockholm Environment Institute – Boston, Tellus Institute
- Riemer, M., & Harré, N. (2017). Environmental degradation and sustainability: A community psychology perspective. In M. A. Bond, I. Serrano-García, C. B. Keys, & M. Shinn (Eds.). *APA handbook of community psychology: Methods for community research and action for diverse groups and issues* (p. 441-456). American Psychological Association.
- Riemer, M., & Reich, S.M. (2011). Community psychology and global climate change: Introduction to the special section. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 47, p. 351, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9397-7>
- Roewe, B. (2020). 42 faith groups in 14 countries announce divestment from fossil fuels. *EarthBeat*. <https://www.ncronline.org/news/earthbeat/42-faith-groups-14-countries-announce-divestment-fossil-fuels>
-

- 
- Sarason, S. B. (1974). *The psychological sense of community: Prospects for a community psychology*. Jossey-Bass.
- Schwartz, J. (2019). In 'strongest' climate ruling yet, Dutch court orders leaders to take action. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/20/climate/netherlands-climate-lawsuit.html>
- Slater, P. (1972). *The pursuit of loneliness: America's Discontent and the search for a new democratic ideal*. Beacon Press.
- Smith, N. (2014). The dark side of globalization: Why Seattle protesters were right. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/01/the-dark-side-of-globalization-why-seattles-1999-protesters-were-right/282831/>
- Thunberg, G., Thunberg, S., Ernman, M., & Emman B. (2019) *Our house is on fire: Scenes of a family and a planet in crisis*. Penguin Books.
- Turner, B. (2017). Contemporary citizenship: Four types. *Journal of Citizenship and Global Studies*, 1(1),147-158. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jcgs-2017-0002>
- UN (1987). *Report of the world commission on environment and development: Our common future*, chairman's foreword. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>
- UN (2012). Future we want. *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform*. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/futurewewant.html>
- UNEP (2019a). *Emissions Gap Report 2019*. <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/30797/EGR2019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- UNEP (2019b). *Emissions Gap Report 2019*. <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/30797/EGR2019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- UNFCCC (2015). What is the Paris agreement? <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/what-is-the-paris-agreement>
- Voorhees, C., & Perkins, D. D. (2007). Is ecological research ecological? Is research validity valid? Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Community Research and Action, Pasadena, CA.
- Watkins M., & Shulman, H. (2008), *Toward psychologies of liberation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wikipedia (2020). *Regional effects of climate warming*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regional\\_effects\\_of\\_global\\_warming](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regional_effects_of_global_warming)
- World Wildlife Fund (2008). *Weathercocks and signposts: The environment movement at crossroads*. [https://wwf.panda.org/wwf\\_news/?140621/Weathercocks-and-signposts-the-environment-movement-at-a-crossroads](https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?140621/Weathercocks-and-signposts-the-environment-movement-at-a-crossroads)
- Wu, X., Nethery, R.C., Sabath, B.M., Braun, D., & Dominici, F. (2020). Exposure to air pollution and COVID-19 mortality in the United States. Harvard University. <https://scholar.harvard.edu/xiaowu/publications/exposure-air-pollution-and-covid-19-mortality-united-states>
- Zani, B. (2012). *Psicologia di comunità. Prospettive, idee e metodi*. Roma: Carocci.