



# THE EMERGENCE SERIES: FUTURE TRENDS

Researched written and co-ordinated by Carole Knight ♦ 021 855 2982 ♦ www.caroleknight.com

## Emergence: Defining our future

NEAR the Storm's River Bridge, amid the dense green foliage that straddles the N2 on the way to the Eastern Cape, lie the remains of a giant. This crumbling skeleton is all that is left of a fallen colossus, a mighty Outeniqua Yellowwood that had once pushed its way from the leaf strewn floor of the forest to tower over all the other trees in magnificent dominance, weathering storms, fires, droughts and floods over the centuries, to finally topple when its 500-year tenure as forest titan had come to an end.

Known as an "emergent" because it had stood head and shoulders above the forest canopy, this collapsed tree symbolises the phenomenon of emergence from the first gathering of like human minds, to maturation as a concentrated aggregation of collective intelligence, becoming a defining paradigm or a distinct pattern in time, to final relinquishment, making way for other trends to follow.

Shaped by bottom-up forces as opposed to top-down ones, emergence is a dynamic self-organising pattern that grows out of millions of individual beliefs, decisions and local interactions, to become a global order of discernable macrobehaviour that responds to specific and changing needs. These "idea revolutions" or emergent worldviews have defined the progression of our civilisation – not in linear advances up the ladder of progress, but rather in the crossing of nonlinear critical thresholds such as the spread of cities throughout Europe, which started around AD 1000.

Each of us contributes to this emergent intelligence although, because our lives unfold on a limited scale, it's impossible to perceive that contribution.

In this way, with our individual lives lived at a minuscule time scale comparatively speaking, it is not possible to see the complete emerging picture or discern the macrodevelopment of a thousand-year cultural shift. However, it is possible to intuit, as now, when a culture is reaching a significant juncture or tipping point, changing from one defined state to another.

### Gateway in time

For 8 000 years humankind has enjoyed what has become known as the Earth's "long summer" – a period of history characterised by optimum climatic conditions that have provided exceptional opportunities for human development. However, the world that we are living in is changing in many fundamental and momentous ways.

On a vast epochal scale it could be that a gateway in time, the giving way of one climatic state to another, is being opened, signalling the separation of one division of geological time from another.

These gateways in time are occasions of devastating upheaval and species extinctions and there are only three agents sufficiently powerful to cause such catastrophic displacement – the shifting of continents, the collision of cosmic bodies, and climate-driving forces such as greenhouse gases.

In acknowledgement of the part our modern civilisation has played in the increase of anthropogenic greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, this period of Earth's history has been labelled the Anthropocene, or Age of Humanity.

Although it is unlikely that anyone living on Earth today will live to a sufficient age to witness the final outcome of this present catalytic transition, even if positive feedback loops amplify climate change to a degree whereby systems collapse occurs on a widespread scale within a very short time frame, environmental sustainability has become the overriding ethos of our present era. But this hasn't always been the case. As in any emergent trend it started with a few isolated people who recognised that the Earth's role as a life support system was changing, progressing from an early embryonic understanding to increased levels of awareness and sophistication, with this awareness growing and meshing around the world until it had reached a critical mass, becoming a significant global groundswell movement.

Given the extent of the globe's environmental problems and the human will necessary to go even halfway to solving it, the green movement could, in time, mark a turning point in the course of human evolution. If it doesn't, we could be in deep, deep trouble.

### Shift in human consciousness

The other overarching theme to cut a swath through our Western culture at this time, and one with a diametrical focus to the environmental movement with its emphasis on "outside" issues, is a profound shift in human consciousness, a heightened awareness and unprecedented awakening that is taking us inside ourselves as the new frontier to be explored.

The convergence of these two landmark developments is pointing to the emergence of a period of unprecedented change – possibly on a scale we have yet to envisage.

Certainly these two transformational phenomena, eco-awareness and heightened human consciousness, are informing and influencing almost every aspect of Western life in the early 21st century, impacting on such diverse human activities as finance, city planning, agriculture and education. As worldviews that are gaining momentum, they are set to have a profound effect on five meta-trends that are helping to define the future of our modern culture.

### Meta-trend 1 – Time acceleration

Just a few decades ago a business letter would have been dictated to a secretary who would then have typed it out, put it into an envelope and posted it off to await a reply in a few weeks. Now, however, business communication is instantaneous, requiring some-times-complicated decisions to be made immediately.

Decisional overload from having to make too many decisions too quickly and its attendant stress is just one additional factor modern people have to deal with in a world where the pace of life is getting faster and faster.

No other generation has been as time-conscious, date-aware and daily-pressured as our own. However, acceleration, or the quickening of time, is not just a phenomenon of this millennium. Each age has been marked by a gathering of pace.

If the pace of development in our age continues to increase, and there is every reason to believe that it will, then the amount of change that we have seen in the past 20 years could be compressed into the next 10 years or less, and after that into an even shorter time span.

This ever-increasing acceleration will have, as a consequence, the reaching of a point known to mathematicians as "singularity", whereby equations break down, ceasing to have any meaning, and the curve of acceleration approaches the vertical. At this point, the rate of change tends towards the infinitely rapid.

Among researchers in this area, there is a general consensus of opinion that this singularity in time lies in the first half of the 21st century and that it could be a consequence of technological acceleration, with ultra-

intelligent computers creating an exponential runaway effect.

Beyond technological acceleration, our future could be defined by a new phase of progress which could be the exploration and development of human consciousness, in time becoming an even faster arena of quickening.

### Meta-trend 2 – Economic remodelling

The economic crisis of 2008/2009, which some believe to be the most severe since the Great Depression and which required US\$3 000 billion as a bailout, has had a surprising effect.

Seizing it as an opportunity for transformation, economists, governmental policymakers and business leaders around the world are using it as a catalyst for reassessing traditional financial and business models.

This changing mindset of "business unusual", prompted by the worst economic downturn in generations, is providing a new compass for global capitalism.

For the unsustainable economic models that were inherited from the last century, which were characterised primarily by "short-termism", with its emphasis on growth at any cost and shored up with borrowed money, had become dysfunctional and hit limits – limits in markets, job creation, the availability of scarce natural resources, high-carbon energy use and credit.

Compounding this reassessment has been the realisation that the risks to economies from climate are real and imminent and that action to guard against that risk is not only feasible and cost-effective, it constitutes good economic development practice.

With such high stakes, the macroeconomic environment is being revisited, taking into consideration the multiple challenges of our time from climate change and a widening gap between rich and poor, to the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services, so that a new post-crisis economic model can begin to emerge.

The result has been innovative international policies such as the United Nations Environmental Programme Financial Initiative's (UNEP FI's) Green Economy Initiative and the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) Green Growth Strategy. While in a move to build a positive alternative to the current crisis in the global financial system, 11 banks from around the world have joined to form The Global Alliance for Banking on Values.

Moving from maximising profits to maximising sustainability, the transition to a global green economy which is based on low carbon, clean energy and resource efficiency, has begun.

Ahead could be an exciting period of innovation and renewal marked by sustainable economic growth, green accounting, green investment, new markets, and the creation of green-collar jobs, green businesses, energy democracy and clean technologies.

### Meta-trend 3 – Resource commoditisation

In the past, pricing of a commodity such as timber didn't reflect its true value as a natural resource.

The price of a log of wood, therefore, gave no credence to the ecosystem services that the forest from which it came provided to adjacent communities, the biodiversity web that stood behind it, the wide range of

inputs necessary for the healthy functioning of an integrated system, its replacement cost or its ability to capture carbon.

Recognising the importance of natural capital and of not discounting a form of capital that is diminishing, this is set to change.

Gearing towards long-term sustainable thinking, we are beginning to quantify the intangible – valuing what previously, because it had no price, had no value, and putting this value at a community or wider population level and not just at institutional or governmental levels. By monetising ecosystems, we are beginning to bring the assets that nature provides into our emerging economic system.

In this way global green assets have been valued at US\$33 trillion and 135 000 hectares of natural rainforest have been estimated to be worth US\$25 000 billion.

While the monetary value of coral reef services, such as food, pollution treatment, climate regulation and tourism, has been set at US\$172 billion per annum, the services of a single hectare of coral reef is valued at US\$130 000 to US\$1.2 million annually.

As we move further into a people-abundant but resource-scarce world of the future we could see essential natural resources such as freshwater being increasingly commoditised.

There will be increasing trade-offs between development and conservation and the benefit/cost ratios of green investments will feature larger in the new financial architecture.

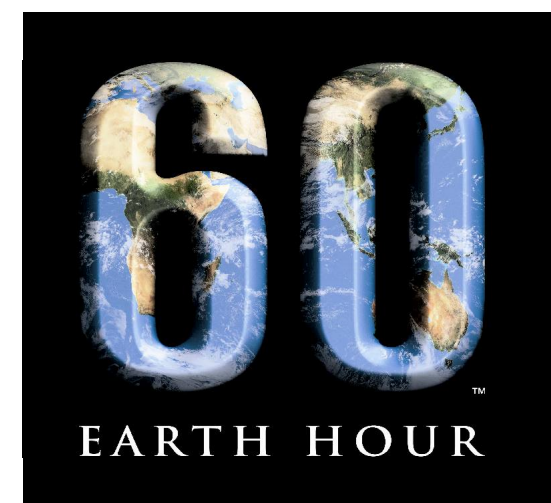
### Meta-trend 4 – Urban migration

Until the modern era less than 3% of the world's population lived in communities of more than 5 000 people. In 2008 the global urban population exceeded the non-rural population for the first time in history.

Today more than half of the world's population lives in urban areas. By 2025 it is estimated that the global urban population could rise to 60%, comprising some five billion people. This means that, quantitatively, we are now a species of city-dwellers.

As complex and stimulating environments that possess a kind of emergent intelligence, cities bring minds together, ensuring that ideas flow readily, leading to the productive cross-pollination of concepts, beliefs, interactions and innovations.

They are dynamic systems with emergent properties linked to information connectivity and social advances. In



this way sustainable city life ranks high on the list of modern inventions.

While 11.4% of the Earth's surface is protected, it is estimated that by 2030 an area the size of California will have been converted to urban areas with most of the urban demographic transformation in the coming decades occurring in Asia and Africa.

Urbanisation characteristically takes place on Earth's most fertile lands with buildings replacing trees and cityscapes replacing grasslands and wetlands. As such, urban land-use and land-cover changes drive landscape fragmentation, threatening biodiversity and ecosystem functioning.

Urbanisation also influences local microclimates due to the urban heat island effect which is influenced by the shape, size and geometry of buildings.

In coastal zones urbanisation and reclamation have led to the loss of marine-vegetated habitats. These mangroves, salt marshes and fields of seagrass capture and store organic carbon and are a means to mitigate climate change.

In these and other ways urban land-use and land-cover changes have considerable impacts on climate, with urbanisation and climate change, two defining environmental phenomena of the 21st century, being increasingly interconnected.

### Meta-trend 5 – Social mobilisation

After the utter devastation of World War II, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was codified, bringing human rights within the international human rights legal framework and giving people a number of rights and freedoms, including freedom to lead a dignified life, free from fear or want, together with freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

The UDHR was later deepened with two key human rights covenants, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). These landmark developments marked a tide of change in the affairs of humankind that ushered in an unprecedented period of social mobilisation.

From a personal perspective this momentous tide of cultural change initiated a redefinition of personal priorities, with an emerging ideology becoming the impetus behind an integration of holistic healing, alternative spirituality, esotericism, environmental sensitivity and alternative lifestyles.

More recently this awakening of heightened conscious has activated a "theosphere" with its emphasis on altering one's personal reality through the application of belief, visualisation and positive affirmation.

The world has also become smarter. In what is known as the "Flynn Effect" research has shown that IQs have gone up by an average of three IQ points a decade.

This rise in IQ scores is caused by shifting social priorities and interactions, changes in what we take seriously, how we use our minds and what we use our minds for. With higher IQs we are doing more intellectually demanding work and becoming better at applying logic.

This powerful intersection of heightened spiritual awareness and higher intelligence is set to put humankind on an entirely new trajectory.

In the words of US President, Barack Obama, "We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek".

It is sure to be an interesting ride.

#### References:

Carole Knight, *Miracles of Hope: Surviving and Thriving in the 21st Century*, White Rock Publishers – www.miraclesofhope.org  
DIVERSITAS 2nd Open Science Conference: Biodiversity and Society – "Understanding Connections, Adapting to Change"  
Santam's "The Eco-centric Journey"  
Tim Flannery, *The Weather Makers: The History and Future Impact of Climate Change*, Penguin Books  
UNEP FI Global Roundtable – "Changing Finance, Financing Change"



ACTIVATED: A theosphere has been opened ushering in a higher level of human consciousness.

There is no more dramatic timeline as only a very narrow window of opportunity exists within which to limit greenhouse gas emissions, as a means of mitigating climate change.

If this is not achieved very soon and at a significant enough level, there will be catastrophic consequences leading to irreversible ecosystem collapse, sea level rise and desertification.

This could cost the world, according to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an additional US\$36 to US\$135 billion each year by 2030.

be worth US\$133 million. The average annual value of services from the world's coastal ecosystems, among the most economically valuable of all ecosystems, has been estimated to be worth more than US\$ 25 000 billion.

While the monetary value of coral reef services, such as food, pollution treatment, climate regulation and tourism, has been set at US\$172 billion per annum, the services of a single hectare of coral reef is valued at US\$130 000 to US\$1.2 million annually.

As we move further into a people-abundant but resource-scarce world of the future we could see essential natural resources such as freshwater being increasingly commoditised.

There will be increasing trade-offs between development and conservation and the benefit/cost ratios of green investments will feature larger in the new financial architecture.

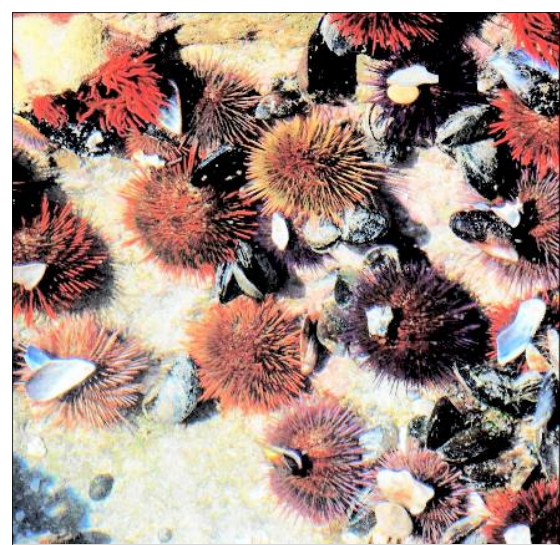
### Meta-trend 4 – Urban migration

Until the modern era less than 3% of the world's population lived in communities of more than 5 000 people. In 2008 the global urban population exceeded the non-rural population for the first time in history.

Today more than half of the world's population lives in urban areas. By 2025 it is estimated that the global urban population could rise to 60%, comprising some five billion people. This means that, quantitatively, we are now a species of city-dwellers.

As complex and stimulating environments that possess a kind of emergent intelligence, cities bring minds together, ensuring that ideas flow readily, leading to the productive cross-pollination of concepts, beliefs, interactions and innovations.

They are dynamic systems with emergent properties linked to information connectivity and social advances. In



VALUABLE ASSETS: We are putting a price to natural ecosystems and the services they provide.



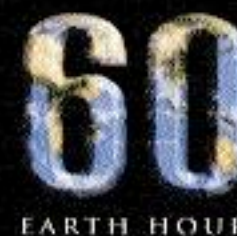
GROWTH OF CITIES: More than half of the world's population lives in urban areas.



Switch off your lights. Switch on a new mindset.



Show your commitment to the wellbeing of our planet. Join 1 billion people worldwide for Earth Hour by switching off your lights on March 27<sup>th</sup> between 20:30 and 21:30. [www.earthhour.org.za](http://www.earthhour.org.za)



Pick n Pay  
Inspired by you