


[Newsroom](#)
[News Releases](#)
[»Web Articles](#)
[In The News](#)
[Multimedia](#)
[Resource Center](#)
[Presentations](#)
[Newsroom > Web Articles](#)


Global ARC Aspires to 'Connect the Dots' in a Worldwide Sustainability Network

San Diego, Calif., Oct. 18, 2010 — Global ARC founder Keith Pezzoli's inspiration and his greatest challenge are one and the same: The number of people around the world seeking to solve global problems is growing by leaps and bounds.

While it's true that many hands make for lighter work, knowledge gaps and redundancies can arise when one set of hands doesn't know what another is doing. That's why Pezzoli created the non-profit Global ARC (or Global Action Resource Center), an effort to "bridge sustainability worldwide" by connecting educators, researchers, scientists, professionals and community organizers who are working to develop community-based solutions concerning water, food and energy sustainability within specific bioregions.



"We're trying to build an online infrastructure that will enable people to connect the dots and bring global-mindedness into research, education and practice," says Pezzoli, who is director of Field Research and a lecturer in the Urban Studies and Planning Program at UC San Diego. "We can't understand what our own prospects are as a nation without a deeper understanding of the global flows, be they information, science, globalization of disease vectors, multiculturalism or migrant flows.

Keith Pezzoli speaks at a celebration marking the end of the inaugural Journey of the Global ARC. Pezzoli, the organization's founder, traveled 2,000 miles from Vancouver, Canada, to Tijuana, Mexico to make 45 site visits. He was especially interested in projects pertaining to rural land conservancies, urban agriculture, river and watershed stewardship, citizen science initiatives and cooperatively owned green businesses.

"We want to get the farm people and the tree people and the water people together with the urbanites to empower connectivity, to enable something to come out of the mix that's larger than the sum of its parts," he adds. "This kind of networking isn't pie in the sky; it's happening, and we want to be a part of it."

The Global ARC, which is sponsored in part by the UC San Diego division of the California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology (Calit2), consists of four main components: Journeys of the Global ARC, a Sustainability Database, a Knowledge Commons and selected sustainability related case studies that will be supported and scaled up by the Global ARC leadership.

The first Journey of the Global ARC took place this past summer, when Pezzoli traveled 1,400 miles by bicycle and 600 miles by boat and train from Vancouver, Canada to Tijuana, Mexico to make 45 site visits. He was accompanied for much of the journey by the SoITrekker, a follow-on support vehicle in the form of a converted 28' motor home outfitted with solar panels on the roof, as well as a solar water heater, composting toilet, rain water collection system, small spice garden, composting pile with worms, interior space retrofitted with all green building materials and an engine that runs on used French fry oil and other forms of biodiesel fuel.

The projects Pezzoli visited during his journey pertained primarily to innovative rural land conservancies, urban agriculture, river and watershed stewardship networks, citizen science initiatives and cooperatively owned green businesses.

"There's a reason behind this rhyme," notes Pezzoli. "We're not just talking about willy-nilly capturing these pearls all over the universe. We want to develop an IT backbone in the form of the Sustainability Database and Knowledge Commons that will enable us to visualize what's happening with all these projects and aggregate the information using interactive mapping, visualization and multimedia.



Pezzoli was accompanied on much of his journey by the SoITrekker, a converted 28' motor home outfitted with solar panels on the roof, a rain water collection system and an engine that runs on used French fry oil and other forms of biodiesel fuel.

"What interests me," he continues, "is the merger of social networking technologies with these kinds of tools so we can bring science to the people through the regional planning process. And when I say 'planning,' I'm not just talking suits and ties and offices. I'm talking about the 12 people who dug the concrete out of a creek to try to get the fish back, or folks developing local food hubs. We want to connect these regional progressive efforts to encourage particular thematic issues."

Water is one thematic issue that holds particular significance in California, notes Pezzoli, and there's much work being done to mitigate water shortages and develop sustainable solutions. The problem, he says, is that scientists and urban planners don't always collaborate with those undertaking grassroots based water-harvesting organization

efforts, such as Brook Sarson, owner of San Diego H2Ome.

"Here we have someone who captures rainwater, recycles grey water and does workshops," notes Pezzoli, "and everything she does requires good science. She's also working in the regulatory innovation space, so that requires knowledge of mechanical and civil engineering aspects as well as legal aspects. So here's an example where we need to connect her to a landscape ecologist, an engineer who will help with the conveyance mechanisms such as valving and conduits from the gutter to buried drums."

And Sarson isn't the only social entrepreneur who could use some help.

"I could tell you 100 different stories very much like this one," Pezzoli says.

Take the Portland Fruit Tree Project. The PFTP hosts a database of fruit trees owned by citizens who promise to donate some of the fruit once it ripens. Ideally, the PFTP would like to plant fruit trees in the public domain, but Pezzoli says its organizers have run into conflict with city ordinances put in place to prevent the city from being liable for slippery sidewalks caused by fallen fruit.

"So there's a lot of science and institutional knowledge here that would be useful," explains Pezzoli, "but these organizations are often struggling non-profits that are not able to spend the time and energy processing their challenge in a way that's friendly to the research world. The Global ARC Sustainability Database would help them do that."

Pezzoli says the project also aspires to help academic researchers "climb down from their ivory towers and begin to see the forest for the trees" within the context of the work community organizations are doing.

"Global ARC enables us to look at ways where science can be useful and where it's gone awry," he adds. "When you begin to spend millions and millions of dollars on understanding how much toxic waste a river can handle and still be viable, when you're measuring poison gradients, well, yes, we need to know that stuff, but there's got to be a balance to that where some of the money goes toward mitigation."

Funding for Global ARC comes mainly from Pezzoli's own pocket and Calit2. He says he feels strongly about keeping the Global ARC Sustainability Database free of charge, so he expects that most of his future funding (for the next Journey of the Global ARC, for example, which will take place in the Hudson River Valley in 2011) will come from grants or private

funding.

For now, Pezzoli is focusing on developing his business model and expanding the reach of the Global ARC. Connecting the world's countless activists, researchers and policy makers on one online database might seem like an insurmountable task, but Pezzoli likes to keep things in perspective.

"If you shoot an arrow through the Equator, it flies out 8,000 miles later. It's a small planet," he says. "If this project takes off — and I believe it will — we will be joining a nascent worldwide network that's all about making regional planning more powerful on the worldwide stage."

by Tiffany Fox, (858) 246-0353, tfox@ucsd.edu

Related Links

[The Global ARC](#)

[H2Ome](#)

[Portland Fruit Tree Project](#)

A UCSD/UCI PARTNERSHIP > California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology [Contact Us](#)

[home](#) : [about us](#) : [people](#) : [research](#) : [partners](#) : [education](#) : [newsroom](#) : [events](#) Calit2 is one of four California Institutes for Science and Innovation